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**STRATEGIC PLANNING: CONTEXTUAL FACTORS THAT FACILITATED
AND/OR CHALLENGED THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC
PLANNING IN TWO NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS**

By

DEVADHASAN MASILAMONY

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
University of San Diego

May 2010

Dissertation Committee

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ABSTRACT

As the nonprofit sector continues to grow in size and importance in American society, successful organizations proactively initiate strategic planning so they can be more responsive to changing circumstances, underlying trends, and shifting demands. At times, however, organizations develop elaborate plans that are never implemented. Unfortunately, there is less systematic research about strategic planning in the nonprofit sector than in the for-profit sector and even less research documenting whether or not the plans that get developed in nonprofit organizations actually get implemented.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how strategic planning improves the effectiveness of two nonprofit organizations that were studied, discern the processes used by the organizations to engage in strategic planning, and analyze the extent to which the plans were implemented. The study employed case study methodology and included a comparative examination of the processes used by the two nonprofit organizations that were studied to develop and implement strategic plans.

Findings revealed that the planning processes in both organizations were relatively effective because both organizations took a collaborative approach to planning and adhered to clear timelines. Both organizations, for example, had a planning committee and facilitator to guide the process. By comparison, the implementation phase, especially in one of the organizations, was not clearly organized, had no clear timelines, and was not consistently monitored.

Factors that facilitated successful implementation of the plans were: full and active executive support, the quality of the final written document, and engaged leadership. The absence of clear implementation of timelines and uncertainty of money

and other resources appeared to be the major factors that inhibited implementation in both organizations. In addition, in one of the organizations, the CEO's leadership of the planning process also appeared to limit the involvement of other members of the organization which, in turn, resulted in implementation problems.

This study contributes to the field since few empirical studies of strategic planning have been conducted in the nonprofit sector. Additionally, it serves as a useful tool for organizations that wish to undertake a successful strategic planning and implementation process to improve their effectiveness.

DEDICATION

To My Family

Illiterate parents valued education and taught me many values, the most important among them being to trust God, work hard, and show concern for the less fortunate people in society. Siblings (two brothers and four sisters and their spouses) and nieces and nephews, currently pursuing their own studies in schools and colleges, have been a tremendous support.

To the Archdiocese of Delhi

Archbishop Vincent M. Concessao, the priests, and all religious members of the archdiocese have provided me many opportunities to develop my skills over the years, and are responsible for me being able to study in the United States.

To the People of Santa Sophia Church

Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to the people of Santa Sophia Church in Spring Valley California, with whom I have had the privilege to minister and journey together in one faith. Your love, friendship, encouragement, financial support, and prayers inspired me and encouraged me to work harder especially when I was discouraged and loaded with work and often wondering if I should complete my doctoral program.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

The nonprofit sector continues to grow in size and importance in modern society. In order to respond to growing needs and increased competition, many nonprofit organizations incorporate strategic planning into their regular operations (Inglis, 2001). Their purpose is to make their organizations more responsive to changing circumstances, underlying trends, and shifting demands. In other words, according to Larson (1998) the goal of strategic planning is to be proactive instead of reactive (e.g., waiting for drop in sales, threatening competitors, demanding creditors, or emergencies to arise before taking action).

But today, often, organizations do not engage in strategic planning, because they desire a strong visionary outlook and proactive nature or to improve their work performance. Rather, organizations often tend to engage in strategic planning when they are asked to respond to external pressures such as declining funds and heightened pressures from major stakeholders (Larson, 1998). At times key stakeholders —e.g., donors—expect the organizations they support to undertake strategic planning, with the hope it will improve the organization's effectiveness (Inglis, 2001).

For strategic planning efforts to have a positive impact, organizations need to change the way they view their purpose for strategic planning. For example, every organization needs to continue to refine its work processes and be open to new ways of thinking and innovative ideas in order to survive and become effective. According to the Population Ecology Perspective developed by Hannan & Freeman (1977), it is the external environment that determines which organizations will survive and which

organizations will not survive. Therefore, in order to survive and become effective in this competitive and changing environment, organizations must optimize performance by shifting their focus and strategies (Bryson, 2004). Strategic planning, therefore, has become a major feature in professionally managed organizations and plans are initiated not only to respond to external pressures, as claimed by Inglis (2001), but also to improve organizational effectiveness (Bryson).

In order to create a strategic plan, organizations spend a lot of money, time, personnel, and other resources. According to Speculand (2009), U.S. managers spend more than \$10 billion annually on strategic analysis and strategy formulation. Besides money, for many nonprofit organizations, the process has, indeed, become lengthy and time consuming; and money to develop and support the strategic planning effort is often in short supply. Unfortunately, in spite of this lengthy and costly exercise, strategic planning has often failed to produce the desired results in nonprofit organizations. While the literature does not claim that strategic planning is a total failure in all organizations, it does document that many organizations struggle to benefit from strategic planning when the plan is actually implemented (McCluskey, 2002).

It is unfortunate to see well-considered plans sitting on the shelf collecting dust, and, when this happens in organizations the planning process does not bring much positive change. According to McCluskey (2002), one of the reasons that change does not occur in organizations stems from the lack of a clear implementation strategy. McCluskey reflects that a careful plan and an effective implementation strategy can increase the likelihood of successful change. He further suggests that if plans are to produce the desired results, individuals who may be affected by the plan should

participate and be involved in planning for the change. Unfortunately, although plans are normally developed by a representative committee, implementation often rests with a single individual or a small group that do not necessarily represent all stakeholders in the organization.

A research study conducted by Mara (2000) demonstrates that when the implementation of a plan is limited to an individual or to a small group, it often lacks the support of key stakeholders necessary for successful implementation of the plan and, as a result, the plan gets sidelined. According to Mara, the fundamental reasons that this happens are (a) inadequate staff and (b) heavy workloads in organizations. Mara advocates a committee that would guide the implementation process.

Speculand (2009) claims organizations often assume that once strategic planning is designed automatically it gets executed. He claims that implementation of the strategic planning process suffers when plans are not treated as a high priority and managers do not pay serious attention in the implementation of plans.

While the research studies of Inglis (2001) and McCluskey (2002) have been helpful in defining some of the factors that facilitate and constrain the successful implementation of strategic planning, a comprehensive investigation of these factors has not been conducted in either nonprofit or for-profit organizations. Inglis (2001) suggests that a clear process is the key element to the success of strategic planning, where as McCluskey (2002) focuses instead on the importance of involving key stakeholders. This study will examine the interdependencies between the process and stakeholders and will look to understand the dynamics of the interactions between these two key elements.

Purpose of the Study

Whether ‘not-for-profit’ or ‘for-profit,’ every organization has a mission and purpose. Organizations engage in strategic planning and development in order to achieve their mission and successfully serve customers and/or clients. Therefore, the purpose of this research study is to conduct an in-depth, comparative examination of the processes used by two nonprofit organizations engaged in strategic planning and implementation and to analyze to what extent the strategic plans in each organization were implemented and to what extent the implemented strategic plans enabled these organizations to achieve their mission and improve their services to clients.

These selected organizations are representatives of many other nonprofit organizations because they are midsized and have experience with the planning and implementation of the process of strategic planning. The case study of two organizations that are currently in operation will add value to the existing body of theoretical literature.

This research study identifies possible areas for improvements in the strategic planning and implementation processes of non-profit organizations. The study also analyzes two organizations’ monitoring and evaluation strategies for the purpose of assisting both not-for-profit and for-profit organizations involved in strategic planning processes suggestions for improvement and efficiency. The following were the goals of this research study:

1. Analyze various factors described in the literature for effective implementation of strategic plans and identify those factors that are not discussed in the literature, but appear relevant for the successful implementation of strategic plans.

2. Compare the planning process of two cases in terms of the various models described in the literature to develop strategic plans in organizations and identify the perceptions of stakeholders about the planning processes in which their organizations have been engaged.
3. Assess the implementation process of the two cases and determine if the plans were fully implemented and if the factors analyzed contributed to either full or partial implementation. If they were not fully implemented, determine why full implementation did not occur and what particular factors prevented the organizations from implementing the plans completely.

Research Questions

The study analyzed the various factors that facilitated and inhibited the implementation process in two organizations. The research findings provided insights that can be used to better understand the success and failure of strategic planning and implementation processes in other organizations. The following were the key research questions that were addressed in the research study:

1. What are key stakeholders' perspectives of the strategic planning process in their organizations and what roles did they play in the planning process?
2. What procedures were used to develop strategic planning in the organizations and what do participants say about these techniques?
3. To what extent was the plan implemented? If implementation was incomplete what are the reasons for not fully implementing the plan?
4. What are the contextual factors that facilitated and/or inhibited the implementation of strategic plans in the organization?

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, it is useful to become familiar with the following terms that will be used throughout the course of this research:

1. **Nonprofit organization:** A tax-exempt organization is eligible to receive tax-deductible gifts because it provides service to the public. A nonprofit organization has three attributes: (a) it is legally and structurally nonprofit; (b) it provides for social needs; and (c) it is philanthropy with a large part of revenues coming from tax-deductible contributions (James, 1987).

2. **For-profit Organization:** A for-profit organization intends to operate a business, which will return a profit to the owners or shareholders.

3. **Board Members:** Members of an organization's governing body responsible for the affairs and conduct of the organization (Herman, 1997).

4. **Stakeholder:** A stakeholder is anyone who cares, or should care, about the organization—anyone who has a “stake” in the success of its mission (Allison, 1997). According to Bryson (2004), a stakeholder is any person, group, or organization that can place a claim on an organization's resources or output or that is affected by that output.

5. **Strategy:** Strategies are overall priorities or directions adopted by an organization. They are choices about how best to accomplish an organization's mission and in order to achieve its mission. Being “strategic” means making conscious choices as to how an organization is planning to use its limited resources to achieve its purpose in response to a dynamic environment (Allison, 1997).

6. **Strategic Planning:** Strategic planning is an organized effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it

does, and why it does it. It responds to an environment that is dynamic and hard to predict.

7. Strategic Thinking: Making decisions regarding what an organization will do and what it will not do, where it should focus its energies by prioritizing its activities.

8. Strategic Management: A process that develops a continuing commitment to the mission and vision of the organization and maintains a clear focus on the organization's strategic agenda throughout its decision-making process and activities.

9. Long Range Plan: Such a plan assumes current trends will continue and focus on setting long-range objectives. For nonprofit organizations, a 3-5 year timeframe is recommended for a meaningful long-range planning because of the fast pace of change in technology, political and economic environment, internal realities, and community conditions. Five-year plans may be more appropriate for those organizations with extensive physical plants or very large service constituencies, such as schools, colleges, and hospitals (Swayne, 2006).

10. Operating Plan: Operating plans are the detailed action plans to accomplish the strategic goals laid out in the strategic plan. Allison (2005) says that operating plans primarily affect day-to-day implementation of strategic decisions.

CHAPTER II REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This section of the paper reviews relevant literature for a study of strategic planning and the implementation process. Although the focus of the dissertation will be on the strategic planning process and implementation in the nonprofit sector, literature on this topic is limited, unlike the literature in the for-profit sector. Strategic planning is well established and widely recognized as a useful process within the private sector. Therefore, in this review, the researcher will draw upon literature about strategic planning from the private (for-profit) sector to supplement the more limited body of literature in the nonprofit sector.

The literature review has been divided into four sections. The first section describes the origin and definition of strategic planning. Section Two will describe the strategic planning process in detail. The third section considers the important elements of implementing the strategic plan. And section Four discusses the successes and failures of strategic planning and the implementation process.

Origin and Definition of Strategic Planning

In this section the paper will discuss the origin and evolution of the concept strategic planning over a period of time. Different sectors such as the military, nonprofit, and for-profit organizations have adopted the principles of strategic planning as it has evolved.

Origin and Etymology of the Term “Strategy”

The word “strategy” derives from the Greek term *strategos*, meaning “the art of the general” (Collis, 2005), which comes from roots meaning “army” and “lead”

(Swayne, 2006). According to Swayne, the Greek verb *stratego* means “to plan the destruction of one’s enemies through effective use of resources” (p.7) and for Collis (2005) the term “strategy” refers “to the general’s plan for arraying and maneuvering his forces with the goal of defeating an enemy army” (p.1). A more practical overview of the evolution of the term begins with the use of strategic planning in World War II. In World War II, governments were forced to address and strategize about long-range allocation and utilization of their limited resources (Wortman, 1988) with a goal of promoting and securing their vital interests (Collis, 2005).

Although the term “strategy” was closely associated with war, the meaning of the word has definitely evolved with time, and it is now used in many different disciplines such as national policy, diplomacy, military operations, sports, games, and for-profit and nonprofit organizations. Von Neumann and Morgenstern first used the term “strategy” in a business context in 1947 in their examination of game theory (Cadotte, 2003).

According to Cadotte (2003), “strategy” pertains to the allocation of resources and results in a series of selective investment decisions. Collis (2005) defines strategy in terms of what a business can do—that is, its strengths and weaknesses—and what possibilities are open to—that is, the outer environment of opportunities and threats. Morgan (2007) states that the essence of “strategy” is in the activities—choosing to perform activities differently or to perform different activities than rivals. Cadotte (2003), Collis (2005), and Morgan (2007) further explained “strategy” as an attempt to think and act better than other players in competitive situations and a broad formula for how a business is going to compete. Strategy aims to give the organization a competitive advantage over rivals through differentiation.

King (1998) attempts to make sense of strategic planning by focusing on the two words that, together, make up the strategic planning label. According to King (1998), strategic planning is “strategic” because it involves preparing the best way to respond to the circumstances of an organization’s environment. It is “planning” because it involves intentionally setting goals and developing methods to achieve them.

Ackoff (1970) popularized the concept of “strategic planning” in the private sector. Later Ansoff, Declerck, and Hayes (1976) introduced a shift in terminology and procedures from strategic planning to strategic management. Soon the new concept became popular in the private sector and many business organizations began to use the revised terminology of strategic management instead of strategic planning (Powers, 1990).

So now, the term strategic management rather than strategic planning is used. According to Steiss (1985), the fundamental distinction between the two terms includes the realization that strategic management assumes a more defined future and is therefore focused on determining what an organization should specifically do, whereas strategic planning anticipates the potential opportunities and direction of an uncertain future. Strategic management is the process of specifying the organization’s objectives, developing policies and plans, and allocating resources to implement the policies and plans to achieve the organization's objectives. Strategic management, therefore, combines the activities of the various functional areas of an organization to achieve organizational objectives. It is the highest level of managerial activity, usually formulated by a Board of Directors and performed by the organization's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and executive team.

The strategic plan is usually focused on the entire organization and it is generally viewed as beneficial if all the stakeholders are involved in the strategic planning process (Barrows, 2009). On the other hand, the focus of strategic management is not necessarily on the entire organization, but could be a particular department, product, service or program, and often, a special team is involved in its implementation.

The concept of strategic planning did not become popular in the nonprofit sector until the 1990s. It was Cook (1990) who introduced strategic planning to the nonprofit sector. Today, strategic planning has become as common in nonprofit organizations as strategic management is common in the for-profit sector. King (1998) claims that, for many management gurus, strategic planning has become a magic pill to treat a range of organizational problems. However, King (1998) also believes that strategic planning is not the entire solution in itself but is rather a tool and Bryson (2004) and Swayne (2006) call strategic planning a management tool and they claim that it is not enough to develop a good plan but for a plan to be effective and bring organizational changes it must be effectively implemented.

Meaning and Definition of Strategic Planning

Planning is a way of looking toward the future and deciding what the organization will do in the future. Strategic planning is a management tool and a disciplined effort to produce decisions and actions that guide and shape what the organization is, what it does, and why it does it (Bryson, 1995). According to Espy (1998), strategic planning is “the development of a set of goals, hopes, and dreams for the future, accompanied by a set of actions to help achieve those goals.” According to Espy (1998), it is not enough to have hopes and dreams; an organization must also have a clear idea of its ultimate destination

and effective strategies to achieve these hopes and dreams. Larson (1998) states that at the beginning of implementation of the strategic planning process organizations must clarify its purpose as what it wants to do and how it wants to achieve its purpose.

According to the Alliance for Nonprofit Management (2004) being strategic means being clear about the organization's objectives, being aware of the organization's resources, and incorporating both into a conscious response to a dynamic environment. Clear understanding of objectives and an organization's resources enable organizations to plan effective strategies and provide better services with its limited resources (King, 1998). A clear strategy also helps stakeholders understand the "big picture" and decide what is best for the organization (Espy, 1998).

Bryson (2004), while defining strategic planning, said that organizations must be careful when they do not know where they are going, because they might not reach the destination. Bryson (2004) cautions that although strategic planning gives a sense of direction and purpose, without proper guidance and a relatively concrete implementation plan, organizations can become lost and unable to reach their goals. Strategic planning, therefore, ideally provides a road map (Swayne, 2006) that enables people to make optimal choices. Espy (1998) further states that, as a road map, strategic planning helps organizations make the right choices and move from their present position to achievement of their strategic goals. According to Duncan (1995), strategic planning is a process used in an organization to understand the situation and develop decision-making guidelines (strategy) to move the organization into the future.

In short, a well-developed strategic plan intends to produce fundamental decisions that guide and shape what an organization is, what it does, as well as why and how it does

it (Swayne, 2006). Cook (1990), Espy (1998), and Bryson (2004) agree that strategic planning can help organizations think and act strategically, clarify the future of the organization, set priorities, make forward thinking decisions, solve organizational problems, improve performance, and deal more effectively with an ever-changing environment. They also provide a well-considered caution that change is not automatic and organizations experience successful planned change only when plans are implemented with consistency over time.

Allison (2005) agrees with the above claim and he further states that strategic planning is a management tool developed to help organizations and leaders set direction and do a better job. As a tool, it can help an organization focus its priorities in response to a changing environment and ensure that members of the organization are working toward the same goal. Consistent with this thinking, Allison defines strategic planning as:

A systematic process through which an organization agrees on and builds commitment among stakeholders to prioritize areas that are essential to its mission and are responsive to the environment. Strategic planning guides the acquisition and allocation of resources to achieve these priorities (p. 1).

Espy (1998) agrees with Allison (2005) and says that nonprofit organizations have many choices in the face of changing client or customer needs, including funding availability, competition and other factors. Being “strategic” requires recognizing those choices and committing to a particular choice that will benefit the organization. For Allison (2005), strategic planning is a systematic process because it involves preparing the best way to respond to the organization’s changing environment, which is often

unknown and unexpected. Therefore, plans must be prepared, proactively, to respond to the unknown and hostile environment (Espy, 1998).

For Allison (2005), the process is about planning because it involves intentionally setting goals and objectives and developing an approach to achieve them. However, Allison cautions that a strategic plan alone is not enough and will not produce results unless organizations have a clear implementation plan. A strategic plan is merely a means and not the end in itself. Plans have to be implemented to produce results. And well-developed plans produce better results and make implementation easier. According to Allison, a well-developed plan involves key stakeholders and accomplishes a thorough analysis of the organization, and for Inglis (2001), such a process is participatory in nature.

In addition, Allison (2005) states that strategic planning is also “disciplined” because it calls for a certain order and pattern to keep it focused and productive (Alliance for Nonprofit Management, 2004). This process raises an array of questions that help planners examine past experiences, test assumptions, gather and incorporate information about the present, and anticipate the future. Bryson (2004) states that a disciplined organization is one that both defines where it wants to be and manages change through an action-oriented agenda to achieve its goals. Bryson (2004) further clarifies systematic or disciplined planning in the following ways: Disciplined planning is:

- a way of thinking, acting and learning
- a comprehensive view of focusing on the “big picture,” and also leads to specific and targeted actions
- often visionary and usually proactive rather than reactive

- flexible and practical
- a guide for decision-making and resource allocation. (p. 3)

Allison (2005) further claims that the strategic planning process is about fundamental decisions and actions, because choices must be made in order to address the attributes mentioned above. The plan is ultimately a set of decisions about what to do, why to do it, and how to do it. Since it is impossible to account for everything that needs to be done in an organization, strategic planning implies that some organizational decisions and actions are more important than others. Strategic planning, therefore, enables organizations to make tough decisions about what is most fundamental in order to achieve organizational success in challenging environments.

Allison (2005) and King (1998) accept that organizations face many challenges including changing client or customer needs, shrinking dollars, increasing competition, and other factors. They agree that a good strategic plan enables organizations to become aware of those challenges and choose the most effective responses to address them. More specifically, strategic planning involves acknowledging the need to generate new ideas and innovations that facilitate reaching a desired outcome.

Cook (1990) agrees with Allison (2005) and maintains, "Strategic planning is an effective culmination of both a process and a discipline, which if faithfully adhered to, produces a plan characterized by originality, vision, and realism. Both the discipline and the process are aimed at total concentration of the organization's resources on mutually predetermined outcomes" (p.27). Kaufman and Grise (1995) state "if strategic planning is properly done, it tells us where to head, why to go, and what functions and resources it

takes to get from here to there” (p.27). For Grise (1995), strategic planning gives direction to achieve organizational objectives.

Bryson (2004) further emphasizes that, in order for a plan to be effective and create positive changes in an organization, it must have a clear planning and implementation process. The process must include key stakeholders, such as decision makers, top-level management, and internal and external stakeholders who are associated with the organization, and those who are responsible for implementing the plan. Bryson (2004) and Inglis (2001) strongly recommend the involvement of key stakeholders in the strategic planning process. According to Bryson (2004), a clear and participatory process would provide direction in implementing the plan. Inglis (2001) further states a participatory process of key stakeholders makes a strategic planning process effective, successful, easier to implement, and enables them to feel ownership of the plan. Hence, the literature overwhelmingly suggests that in order for strategic plans to succeed and produce desired results, the organization must include the key stakeholders in the planning process. Informed by this research, this study defines strategic planning as the integration of a clear process—as explained in the preceding paragraphs—and key stakeholders to enable an effective implementation.

Process of Strategic Planning

In this section, the review will discuss some of the common steps that the literature recommends in order to develop strategic plans in organizations. The recommended steps are similar in most pieces of literature (Hamermesh, 1986; Ahoy, 1998; Bryson, 2004; Allison, 2005; Mintzberg, 1994; Hrebiniak, 2006; Roussal, 2006;

and Swayne, 2006). Steps indicate the importance of the process and Inglis (2001) claims that a clear process is a foundation to the implementation of the plan.

The literature suggests that to create an effective plan for an organization, whether the organization is not-for-profit or for profit, one must conduct a clear analysis of the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Allison (2005) takes the first letter of each of these four words, and calls it "SWOT analysis." Bryson (2004), on the other hand, calls this the "SWOC analysis" which stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. Despite the somewhat different acronyms, the authors are in agreement about the general outline of the strategic planning process. The following are some of the strategic planning process steps recommended in literature.

Initiate and Agree on a Strategic Planning Process

The literature overwhelmingly suggests that before an organization initiates the strategic planning process, it should assess whether the organization is prepared for such an exercise. According to Schein (2004) the need for change must come from within the organization. Further, organizations ought to assess issues such as the organization's readiness, leaders' commitment to the effort and whether they are able to devote the necessary time, resources, and the organization's funding capacity to initiate as well as to implement the plan (Allison, 2005).

Once the organization is ready, Allison (2005) suggests that it should negotiate agreement among key internal and external decision makers or opinion leaders about the overall strategic planning efforts and the key planning steps. According to Bryson (2004) support and commitment of key decision makers are vital if strategic planning is to

succeed. The organization should then decide which persons, groups, units, or departments should be represented in the planning process (Allison, 2005).

In order to elicit participation and analyze an organization's readiness for the process, Bryson (2004) states that organizations should obtain agreement on the following prior to beginning the strategic planning process:

- 1) Purpose of the effort
- 2) Preferred steps in the process
- 3) Form and timing of reports
- 4) Role, functions, and membership of any group or committee empowered to oversee the effort, such as strategic planning coordinating committee
- 5) Role, functions, and membership of the planning team
- 6) Commitment of resources necessary for proceeding with the effort
- 7) Any important limitations on or boundaries for the effort (p. 35)

When an organization agrees to the above and determines that it is ready to begin strategic planning in the organization, Allison (2005) suggests the following five steps to pave the way for an organized process:

- 1) Identify specific issues that the planning process should address
- 2) Clarify role (who does what in the process)
- 3) Create a planning committee
- 4) Develop an organizational profile
- 5) Identify the information that will help make sound decisions (p. 10)

According to Bryson (2004), an informal stakeholder analysis will help the organization identify whom to include in the planning committee, and it will help

organizations decide whether it needs different missions and perhaps different strategies for different stakeholders and issues. Agreeing to a clear and common process at this stage is important for the success of strategic planning in organizations. According to Bryson (2004), the informal analysis must be done before the organization initiates the strategic planning process. Most important is to ensure that the people who are fairly representative of and respected by the organization's leadership are included on the planning team (Bryson, 2004).

Develop a Mission and Vision

If the organization is ready for the strategic planning process, the next step in the process is to revisit the organization's mission and vision statements. In order to conduct an effective organizational analysis, organizations should have a clear mission, vision, and value statements (Allison, 2005). In keeping with the strategic planning literature (Mintzberg, 1994; Bryson, 2004; Allison, 2005; and Swayne, 2006) organizations that do not have a mission must create one. And organizations that have a mission must clarify and, if necessary, make changes to existing plans in order to respond to the changes in the environment.

The mission statement sets forth the organization's purpose, including a description of what the organization does and who should benefit from the organization's activities. According to Larson (1998), a good mission statement should have three components: (1) defines the business, (2) makes reference to major stakeholder, and (3) reflects a vision for the venture, and inspires people in the organization. And, for Allison (2005), a mission statement typically describes an organization in these terms:

- Purpose: why the organization exists and what it seeks to accomplish
- Business: the main method or activity through which the organization works to fulfill this purpose
- Values: the principles or beliefs that guide an organization's members as they pursue the organization's purpose. (p. 12)

Allison (2005) describes the mission statement as a summary of the who, what, and why of an organization's work, while a vision statement presents an image in words of what success will look like when the organization achieves its purpose. Vision is a clear statement of what an organization wants to be in the future. For Allison (2005), "a vision is a model that people and organizations can bring into being through their commitment and actions" (p.12). Vision projects and answers the question, "what will success look like?" once programs are implemented. Mission and vision must be clear and attainable. In this regard, Swayne (2006) suggests that the mission of an organization must be credible, realistic, attainable, and assist in differentiating the organizations from all its competitors. According to Swayne (2006), a mission statement enables an organization to ask three important questions before it takes up any new programs.

- Are we not doing some things we should be doing?
- Are we doing some things we not should be doing?
- And are we doing some things we should continue to do but in a fundamentally different way? (p. 191)

These are important questions and they enable an organization to understand its activities, needs of its clients, and to take up programs in line with its mission.

Analyze Internal and External Environments

No organization exists in a vacuum and the definition of strategic planning offered earlier stresses the importance of focusing on the future within the context of an ever-changing environment. Therefore, once an organization has established some clarity on why it exists, what it does, and what it hopes to achieve, Swayne (2006) recommends that it should take a clear look at its current situation including its external and internal environments and should become aware of and understand outside forces and what resources and capacities the organization brings to the work of its mission. This step requires gathering up-to-date information about the organization's internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as its external opportunities and threats (SWOT). Such an organizational assessment will help refine and possibly reshape the list of strategic issues the organization faces and seeks to answer through the strategic planning process.

A critical environmental analysis helps planners understand their organizations, their opportunities and threats, and plan programs based on findings. Barrows (2009) cautions when managers believe their business experience and knowledge base alone equips them with all the information they need to conduct an organizational assessment. Such a belief undermines critical thinking needed to formulate effective strategic planning.

According to Swayne, the following questions might be helpful in analyzing the organization:

- What are the organization's internal strengths (what does it do well)?
- What are its weaknesses (where can it improve)?
- What are the external opportunities (changes that are taking place)? and

- What are the external threats that hinder its pursuit of achieving its mission (changes that the organization needs to guard against)?

Swayne (2006) claims that a clear analysis can provide concrete information and can help planners to set priorities and make appropriate decisions about the organization's future directions.

Mintzberg (1994) cautions that organizations should not go with the premises that the world is supposed to hold still while a plan is being developed and stay on the predicted course while the plan is being implemented. While certain repetitive patterns, such as seasons, may be predictable, the forecasting of discontinuities such as a technology or price increase is virtually impossible. The dynamic and unpredictable nature of an organization's external environment underscore the critical importance of a thorough and up to date environmental scan while formulating a strategic plan.

Identify and Set Priorities

Once organizations have conducted the internal and external assessment, it is recommended they establish their overall direction. Bryson (2004) suggests that at this point organizations identify important issues and priorities, which is at the heart of strategic planning. Important issues are likely to emerge during the course of plan development: stakeholder analyses, mission, vision discussions, and environmental scans. According to Bryson, these issues can be arranged into three main categories:

- Current issues that likely require immediate attention and action
- Issues that require no action at present but need to be continuously monitored
- Issues that are likely to require action in the near future but can be handled as part of the organization's regular planning cycle (p. 86).

Planning is necessary for any organization. However, Espy (1988) rightly cautions that no organization can make detailed plans for every aspect of its future because the future is unknown. However, a careful prioritization of issues will allow organizations to focus limited resources on the most pressing needs. Barrows (2009) states organizations often do not give enough time to formulating a plan and, in order to address planning properly, meetings should be adequately timed—over days or weeks if necessary—so that sufficient preparation and review of discussion can take place.

The above-mentioned process is common in most of the literature and it strongly emphasizes the need for a clear process. A clear process not only enables an organization to analyze where it is currently and where it wants to go in the next few years, but a clear process helps an organization bring its various stakeholders together and it also enables in the implementation of the plan.

Implementing the Strategic Plan

Formulating strategy is difficult. Making strategy work—implementing it throughout the organization—is even more difficult. Hrebiniak (2006) states without effective implementation no strategy can succeed. According to Hamermesh (1986), “Implementation is the process of ensuring that strategy is embodied in all that an organization does. The objective of implementation is to create connections between strategic objectives and the organization’s daily activities” (p.43). When strategy makers neglect the critical connections between planning and implementation--words and deeds, and ideas and actions--they are almost guaranteed to fail (Morgan, 2007). According to Collis (2005), “Implementation describes the concrete measures that translate strategic

intent into actions that produce results. Implementation requires continues managerial attention at all levels” (p.62).

Fogg (1999) suggests that the implementation plan must be developed as an integral part of the strategic planning efforts and he provides two reasons: (a) it takes advantage of the valuable thinking that goes on during planning and (b) if organizations have a strategic plan but no corresponding process to implement it, it will probably fall back on the same tools organizations used with only modest success in the past.

Hrebiniak (2006) agrees with Fogg about the importance of developing an effective implementation plan in realizing the objectives of the strategic plan and he suggested that managers must be thinking about execution even as they are formulating plans.

According to Ahoy (1998), people have good intentions when they develop a plan but plans often are not implemented because when those engaged in the planning process go back to their departments, they are overwhelmed with their daily work and do not have time. The good intentions and the initial enthusiasm do not remain long because of their other priorities. In order for a plan to be effective, Hrebiniak (2006) states that long-term needs must be translated into short-term objectives. Organizations must provide feedback and communicate with the staff about the status of the plan and internal and external changes that facilitate and inhibit the implementation of plans.

Another reason, according to Ahoy (1998), that plans sit on the shelf collecting dust is that organizations that have developed plans do not have a clear implementation strategy. In other words, the planning committee’s work ends once the strategic plan is created. The plan is then left to a special implementation committee or the frontline staff members to enact the implementation process. The reason according to Hrebiniak (2006)

is that some top-level managers believe implementation is beneath them and is something that should be delegated to lower-level employees. These managers believe their role is to plan and think strategically, and the role of lower-level staff is simply to carry out the top-level manager's demands and implementation requirements.

The execution of strategy usually requires longer than the formulation of strategy and it costs a lot of money, time, and human resources (Hrebiniak, 2006). Unfortunately, many nonprofit organizations do not have the time nor enough money, much less the trained personnel or other resources required to implement the plan.

This study will investigate reasons why some plans are successfully implemented and some are not by examining two nonprofit organizations. Strategic planning experts such as Hamermesh (1986), Ahoy (1998), Roussal (2006), Bryson (2004), and Hrebiniak (2006) suggest that plans must be integrated with the daily activities of the organization and managers must think about execution even as they are formulating plans. They suggest the following elements for an effective implementation: commitment of leaders and other key stakeholders, sensitivity to organizational culture, communication, a dedicated implementation committee, and evaluation of the plan. These elements—which are discussed in more detail below—will be explored in more depth in this study and validated and expanded upon, or challenged, as appropriate.

Commitment and Readiness of Leaders and Other Key Stakeholders

As with any major effort, a strategic planning process has its proper time and place in the life of an organization. Certain conditions must exist if strategic planning is to be creative, collaborative, and successful. Allison (2005) states that when organizations initiate a planning process before being ready, they may either conduct an

inadequate process or have the planning process stall abruptly or stop completely. Allison strongly emphasizes the importance of an organization's readiness and commitment of key stakeholders.

The readiness of the organization and commitment of key stakeholders and leaders is crucial for the success and implementation of any plan and, therefore, Ahoy (1998) states that leaders must feel the need for a change and must work in collaboration with other people. In order to work effectively, Clemet (1994) states that every organization has a culture and leaders must understand and work within the existing culture to bring about change in a way that it will be accepted. According to Heifetz (2002), a committed leader understands the culture of the organization and leads the people. He or she mobilizes people to face problems, and organizations make progress because leaders challenge and motivate them.

For a plan to be successful, leaders must understand the importance of the plan and work together as a team to achieve its objectives. In this process, Bryson (2004) claims that leaders "walk with the people" providing them support, guidance, and resources. Bryson (2004) calls good leaders champions who keep the process on track and push, encourage, and cajole the strategic planning team and other key stakeholders to work together to achieve their organization's goals.

However, Inglis (2001) feels that in many nonprofit organizations, the leaders' commitment to the strategic plan ends once the plan is developed, and the plan is then left with a few staff members for implementation. Often those members are left with insufficient training, insufficient resources and without much authority to make decisions. Strategic planning experts claim that such an atmosphere can create dependency on the

top leadership for decisions and can slow down the implementation process. According to Ahoy (1998) situations like this can discourage staff involved in the implementation process and planning fails when it does not receive the support it deserves from top management. Mintzberg (1994) claims that such an accusation is unfounded because no technique ever received more top management support than strategic planning did in its heyday. According to him, the problem is that strategic planning represents a calculating style of leadership instead of a committing style. Leaders with a committing style engage people in the journey and they help to shape everyone on the journey. As a result, enthusiasm inevitably builds along the way. Leaders with a calculating style fix on a destination and calculate what the group must do to get there, with no concern for the members' preferences. Therefore, a strategic plan is not likely to be effectively implemented if the preferences and perspectives of those implementing the plan are not taken into consideration, and, instead, are solely the decree of upper management.

Sensitivity to Organizational Culture

Leaders work more effectively with people when they have an understanding of an organization's culture. Schein (1985) asserts that there are three levels of culture: basic assumptions, values, and artifacts. First, basic assumptions are the circumstances taken for granted in an organization as the "correct" way of doing things. They lie at the deepest level of culture and are the hardest to change. Secondly, the values of the organization refer to a sense of what "ought" to be. An example of a value might be the belief that on the job experience is the best form of training. In such an environment, structured training will not have as much importance as learning from on the job experience. And, finally, artifacts are the overt behaviors and other physical

manifestations of culture. They can usually be observed directly and are easier to change than assumptions and values. Artifacts include, among other things, procedures followed, technology used, and communication methods. It is clear that every organization has a culture and it plays an important role. It influences an organization's functioning and decision-making process. According to Schein (1985), an effective leader therefore must understand and work with the culture in order to bring change.

Communication

Communication is an effective tool for motivating employees, for overcoming resistance, preparing people for change, and giving employees a personal stake in the development and implementation of strategic plans in their organization. According to Nebgen (1991), communication—at each step of the process—has been the critical element in the development and implementation of strategic plans in organizations. Communication enables stakeholders to understand the process and the benefits of the plan to their organization. According to Collis (2005), leaders should use communication to make clear four important points: what the strategy is; why the strategy is important; how effective implementation benefits the organization, staff, and clients; and what role each person will play in implementing the strategy. Nebgen (1991) and Collis (2005) further maintain that communication is ongoing and must begin even before the strategic planning is initiated in an organization. Roussel (2006) claims that communication is not only sending or providing information but also listening to what people are really saying and perceiving what they are expressing through their words, facial expressions, tone of voice, and actions. Roussel further maintains that communication is not just top-down but

also bottom-up. He emphasizes the importance of listening and providing opportunities to people that allows them to express their ideas and opinions.

Schein (2004) describes a healthy office environment where employees are encouraged to participate in the communication process and able to express their ideas and opinions freely and openly. Nebgen (1991) opines that in order to encourage participation, the key decision makers, especially the CEOs, should begin the communication process and create an atmosphere for people to participate. Such an invitation not only creates an opportunity for a free flow of information but also creates an environment for open and free sharing of information and ideas. Longest (2000) suggests that a good communication process clarifies issues and motivates people's participation and involvement. Longest (2000) agrees with Collis (2005) that an effective communication process can turn resistance into support, clarify issues and bring key stakeholders together to create and implement strategic plans.

Inglis (2001) rightly recognized that everyone in the organization could not be on the planning committee; however, a free and healthy communication elicits their participation and plays an important role in sharing information and getting feedback. Therefore, according to Fogg (1994), communication requires consistent effort and attention on the part of the CEO and the management team to effectively communicate an organization's mission, vision, values, and direction to everyone in the organization. If all employees work together and believe in the plan, it can make implementation easier, and Inglis (2001) states that in such an environment implementation of strategic plans can be successful and can produce better results.

Implementation Committee

Swayne (2006) places emphasis on the formation of a committee to implement and communicate the plan among its various stakeholders. The committee must specify how different departments would participate in the implementation process. The committee provides timelines of the implementation process and plans actions which will be required to achieve the objectives. Also, the committee designates who is responsible for the actions, identifies the resources required, and sets standards for measurement.

A clear and time-bound implementation plan is a necessary guide in moving toward the direction specified in the strategic plan. Bryson (2004) states, “Developing an action plan and implementation process and providing the necessary resources will bring life to the plan and create real value for the organizations and stakeholders” (p. 121). Allison (2005) agrees with Bryson and suggests that a time-bound action plan will enable organizations to prioritize its plans as to what activities need to happen, who is responsible for making sure they happen, and the timeframe for what needs to be accomplished.

Evaluating the Implementation of the Strategic Plan

According to Patton (1997), “Evaluation is the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming” (p.23). The above definition provides two important components: (1) evaluation is a systematic collection of information and (2) evaluation provides a variety of possible judgments and future action. Bryson (2004) and Allison (2005) suggest a time-bound action plan for evaluating the successes and failures of the strategic plan.

Allison (2005) recommends the implementation committee monitor and evaluate the plan periodically. He suggests a periodic evaluation, which could be conducted by the implementation committee or a team within the organization. Patton (1997), however, suggests a possible combination of internal and external evaluation. According to Patton, a combination of internal and external evaluation brings credibility to the program.

Allison further suggests that evaluation must be done on a regular basis, no less than once a year. The evaluation committee must assess the progress that has or has not been made and further suggest any major or minor adjustments that should be made to the strategic plan in order to achieve its objectives. The following questions, as suggested by Allison (2005), might provide some guidelines to the evaluation committee to evaluate the plan:

- Is the current strategic plan on target and what has or has not been accomplished?
- Are the assumptions of the internal and external environment still valid?
- What are the current issues the organization is facing and are there any changes or new priorities that have to be added to the strategic plan?
- Are there new performance targets, and/or modified intermediate checkpoints that need to be looked at? (p.180)

According to Allison (2005), Bryson (2004), and Patton (1997) evaluation helps organizations to follow directions established during strategic planning. It further helps leaders to respond efficiently to the unforeseen challenges that they encounter during the implementation process. For Patton, evaluation is educative and on going and helps in the future program planning.

The aforementioned concepts from the literature will provide a conceptual framework for this study. They will, in other words, structure and focus the data analysis process

and, depending on the data and the analysis results, the study will either confirm or challenge these characteristics. This will deepen our knowledge of any categories that seem relevant to understanding the two cases being presented in this dissertation.

Successes and Failures of Strategic Planning and Implementation

In this section of the review, the successes and failures of strategic planning and the implementation process in nonprofit organizations will be explored in greater detail.

Successes of Strategic Planning

Leading strategic planning advocates such as Bryson (2004), Goldsmith (1994), and Fullan (1993) believe that proper implementation of a strategic plan (and, for Fullan, appropriate timing of a planning initiative) do bring change in organizations. All of these authors point out some of the possible benefits of pursuing strategic plans. These authors also note that change is a complex process and agree that change is not automatic. For an organization to experience positive change, organization requires leadership to ensure that strategic planning is carried out effectively. When this happens, Bryson (2004) sees the major benefits of strategic planning as leading to a systematic process of gathering information about the environment and a clarification of an organization's future direction, while providing a sound basis for decision making, improving performance and clarifying roles and responsibilities of organizational members. Further, planning builds teamwork and commitment among various stakeholders.

Strategic planning assists in the allocation of limited resources which can ultimately strengthen an organization's financial viability (Goldsmith, 1994 and Mara 2000). Nonprofit organizations today work in a competitive environment and are beginning to realize that if they are to survive and be effective in delivering their services,

they must recognize challenges and use them as an opportunity for change and growth. Most of the authors in this review suggest that a well-formulated plan will assist organizations to identify those challenges and guide the organization in achieving their goals.

Langley (1988) provides four benefits of formal strategic planning. They include:

- The public relations role in which strategic planning is intended to impress or influence outsiders such as funding partners, new board members, volunteers and employees
- The information role, which provides better communication and input for management decisions
- Group involvement and teamwork, which intends to increase organizational commitment through the interaction of people at all levels of the organization in strategic planning
- Direction and control serves as a guide for decisions and activities toward a desired future (p. 27)

Jasparro (2006), in his study, "Strategic Planning: Is it Worth the Effort? The Superintendent's Perspective," concurs with Langley's approach to the benefits of strategic planning in nonprofit organizations. The study says that strategic planning establishes clear and concise goals and objectives for improving the work. Strategic planning formulates a strong working relationship with the community and the organization. This relationship further fosters a meaningful and effective implementation of the strategic plan.

Allison (2005) summarizes the benefits of strategic planning: “Strategic planning: (1) creates a forum for understanding why the organization exists and the shared values that should influence decisions; (2) fosters successful communication and teamwork among the board of directors and staff; (3) lays the groundwork for meaningful change by stimulating strategic thinking and focusing on what’s really important to the organization’s long-term success; and (4) most importantly, brings everyone together to pursue opportunities for better meeting the needs of clients” (p. 8).

For all these reasons, strategic planning is overwhelmingly viewed as desirable in nonprofit organizations. Much of the literature in the 1990s was directed at tailoring strategic planning to better meet the needs of business (Bryson, 2004). The nonprofit sector has been left to borrow from the experience and research of the private sector. Bryson, an expert of strategic planning in for-profit as well as nonprofit, does a thorough job of examining private sector approaches to strategic planning and its benefits.

Failures of Strategic Planning

In a valuable case study, Jasparro (2006) stated that failure to implement the plan is the greatest impediment to the successful use of strategic planning in nonprofit organizations. The strategic planning process is often conducted at an annual retreat or a meeting where the leadership of an organization gathers to talk about key issues and then return to “business as usual” (Swayne, 2006). According to Barrows (2009), many CEOs believe that effective strategies can be identified, explored, and agreed upon during abbreviated offsite meetings where the main driver of the agenda is the timing of snack breaks. Barrows (2009) emphasized that offsite meetings are useful forums in which to share information and address key issues, meetings should be adequately timed—over

days or weeks if necessary—so that sufficient preparation and review and discussion can occur.

Goodstein and colleagues (1993) observe that strategic planning, in and of itself, should not just be an academic exercise that has little direct use for an organization. Rather, the payoff of strategic planning lies in its direct application of the plan. Strategic planning is often considered an academic exercise when external experts develop the plan and process and do not involve key stakeholders. Jasparro (2006) agreed with Goodstein and commented that strategic planning is only a document, but implementation of its actions brings life to the plan. Kaufman (1995) noted that a strategic plan is futile if it is not implemented and the right people are not involved in planning and implementation, and it makes organizations and planners grow frustrated seeing their product sit on shelves.

Often, plans are considered fruitless because strategic planning was neither deemed a need of the organization nor created as a team effort (Espy, 1986). Often strategic planning is not a team effort because important stakeholders, especially people who will be directly involved in implementation, are not included in the planning. Inglis (2001) in her study emphasizes that success of the plan depends largely upon the participation of key stakeholders. Inglis feels, unfortunately, people who are involved in implementation are often brought in too late, especially in a time of crisis or at the time of implementation.

In many organizations, plans are developed because of pressure from donor agencies (Inglis, 2001), government organizations, the Board of Directors, and a change of leadership. Inglis stated a few more reasons for the failure of strategic planning.

Sometimes key stakeholders such as the board, CEO and staff members are not united nor convinced about the need for strategic planning for their organization. Another reason for failure is that often plans are undertaken to address and find solutions to employees' and organizational problems.

According to Inglis (2001) in some organizations strategic plans are not implemented because they are merely for fundraising reasons. A common understanding among nonprofit organizations is that a good and well-developed strategic plan attracts donors. If the motive for engaging in strategic planning is merely raising money, such planning is likely to be unproductive (Mulhare, 1999). In short, if the purpose of the strategic plan is to get funds and attract more donors, it will not have much impact on the organization once the desired fundraising goal is achieved.

Another failure stems from the fact that in order to develop a comprehensive and attractive plan, organizations need to spend large amounts of money, time and resources (Mara, 2000). For small nonprofit organizations, it is unaffordable but often these organizations are forced to spend money in order to make an attractive plan in the belief that strategic plans will help in fundraising and attracting donors. In situations like this, the value and effectiveness of strategic planning will remain limited to raising funds and plans will not produce larger scale desired results. In some organizations, the process is lengthy and by the time the plan is developed people lose interest in the priorities of the organization change.

Another planning point of failure occurs when external agencies and experts develop strategic plans that minimize the role of staff members. Often those staff members are left to implement the plan that they had little input in creating. Inglis (2001)

says that strategic planning may not bring the desired results unless an organization has the skills, the resources and commitment from key stakeholders, especially people who are responsible for implementing it. From her study, it is clear that some nonprofit organizations do not have enough resources and skills to implement the plan. In some organizations, the key stakeholders do not feel ownership because plans are often being developed by external agencies. In this regard, Swayne (2006) correctly states that if the “stakeholders do not fully understand or faithfully support strategic management and become part of the planning and implementing process, it will not happen” (p.35). A well-prepared plan will not automatically bring change unless organizations have enough resources and commitment from key stakeholders.

Constraints of the Literature and Conclusion

There are many books and articles on strategic planning but few empirical studies in the nonprofit sector discuss this topic. For this review, many search methods were used including the standard search and Business Source Premier to find empirical studies on the topic, but only a limited number of studies—especially about the nonprofit sector—were found. The lack of empirical studies does not undermine the relevance of the topic, however. Strategic planning in the nonprofit sector is as important as it is in the for-profit sector. Today, more and more organizations are beginning to realize the importance of strategic planning, not because it is a requirement from their donors and government agencies, but because strategic planning gives them direction and motivation (Swayne, 2006). Yet, the lack of empirical studies emphasizes the need for further research on this topic.

The literature does suggest that strategic planning is not a “quick fix technique” (Swayne, 2006) to respond to organizational needs and challenges. Research studies reveal that strategic planning has an important role in guiding organizations towards achieving their goals. Jasparro (2006) insisted in his study that a strategic plan establishes clear and concise goals and objectives for improving an organization. His study further revealed that it is not enough to spend a great deal of time, money and resources in developing good plans; it is more important that the plan identifies key issues concerning the organization and be communicated among key stakeholders. Inglis (2001) emphasized the role and need for stakeholders to be involved in developing the plan. Powers (1990) also asserted that key stakeholders should be identified and become part of the planning process. Bryson (2004), Allison (2005), Swayne (2006), and others strongly emphasize the importance of involving key stakeholders in the planning and implementation process. Within the literature there is a strong theme: identifying and involving key stakeholders is important to increase the likelihood that an organization will effectively implement the strategic plan. In general, the current literature is not overly empirical, so this research with its case studies looks to address this issue.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Selecting Organizations and Interview Participants for the Study

Selecting Organizations for the Study

For the study, the researcher chose two nonprofit organizations. The two nonprofit organizations were selected by using the following procedures: First, the researcher met with the executive director for Nonprofit Management Solutions (NMS) and asked her to identify organizations that completed a strategic planning process at least one year ago but not more than three years ago and were currently implementing strategic plans in their organizations. NMS is a nonprofit organization locally located and networks with many nonprofit organizations. NMS provides technical assistance, consultancy, and training services to its member organizations.

Second, the researcher met with the director and staff at the Institute for Nonprofit Education and Research at the University of San Diego to obtain additional information about nonprofit organizations that recently engaged in a strategic planning process.

Finally, the researcher used his experience from working in the nonprofit sector for many years and his contacts with organizations and consultants, especially those involved in initiating strategic plans for nonprofit organizations, to identify possible sites to study. These three approaches were essential to identifying and selecting a minimum of five organizations for a preliminary study which involved visiting the organization's offices, interviewing key personnel, and reviewing each organization's website and any printed materials that describe the organization and its mission. Then, the following criteria were used to determine the final two organizations for this research study:

1. The size of the organization selected for the study was more than 15 staff members and with an annual budget of five to ten million dollars.
2. The organization provides direct services to at least 200 people annually.
3. The organization had longevity, being in existence for at least 10 years and having initiated and implemented strategic plans more than once.
4. The organization must have engaged in strategic planning at least one year ago but not more than three years ago.
5. Members of the organization indicated a willingness to participate in the study.

Among other things, the procedures listed above produced medium level nonprofit organizations for study. The purpose for selection of medium level organizations is that they have a long history of services provided and, presumably, literature that documents their programs and required staff members and resources to implement the plan that was developed through the strategic planning process. Smaller organizations are often unstable and have impermanent programs and inadequate staff, and larger organizations may only provide limited information because of hierarchical structures and the complex nature of the departments. Hence medium size organizations seemed to be the most appropriate groups to study.

Once two organizations were selected, the researcher gathered as much preliminary information as possible, in part by making personal visits to each organization's facility. This enabled the researcher to become familiar with the organization's mission, its activities, and its staff members. The researcher spoke to the directors of each organization and provided a letter of introduction (Appendix-2). The introductory letter contained the purpose of the study and the researcher's expectations from the director, and other staff--in particular, those who would be involved in the interview process. During the introductory visit, the researcher requested access

to relevant documents such as annual reports, evaluation data of program implementation, brochures, and copies of the most recent and any other of the organization's strategic plans. After analyzing each organization's willingness to participate in the research study, the researcher then prepared an interview guide (Appendix-2) —and customized the questions as appropriate—and determined with the assistance of the director, the key individuals to interview.

Selecting Interview Participants

The study relied on individual interviews as the primary data collection tool. In order to conduct an information-rich study, Patton (2002) suggests that care must be taken in choosing who is to be interviewed. The following criteria was used to select participants to be interviewed: experience, knowledge of the programs, availability with regard to time and willingness to become part of this research process, and representation of as wide a range of perspectives as possible.

Based on these criteria, six people from each organization were selected for interviews. They included the executive director, two staff members who participated in the planning and implementation process of strategic planning in the organization, the chairman of the board or the board representative who participated in the strategic planning process, one external stakeholder who was also part of the process, the consultant who initiated the strategic planning process in the organization, and any additional people identified by the snowball sampling process described in the following paragraph. The staff interviewees were carefully selected to ensure that they represented various important departments and programs in the organization. The researcher also interviewed the consultant who led the strategic planning process, because, as the

consultant to the planning process, he or she had an in-depth perspective about the process, organization's preparedness for strategic planning, and the implementation process.

The snowball or chain sampling method was used to locate information-rich key informants for the research study. According to Patton (2002), the snowball method will enable researchers to ask well-situated people questions such as "who knows a lot about strategic planning and the implementing process in the organization?" At the end of each interview, the researcher asked who else should be interviewed for information-rich data. The researcher specifically asked who in the organization might have a somewhat different perspective than the interviewees. By asking different people who else to talk with, the snowball gets bigger and bigger and provides better and more options for selecting the right people for the interview study.

Data Collection Procedures

Qualitative Interviewing: Rationale and Procedures

The study used qualitative interviews as its primary data collection method. Yin (2003) highly recommends qualitative interview studies when the focus is on contemporary phenomenon within some real life situation or context because such studies can be exploratory and descriptive. He recommends qualitative interview study because one cannot understand feelings, thoughts, and intentions of people, situations, and organizational culture through observation and review of documents. Schein (2004) also indicates that it is hard to understand how people operate in their work situations and construct meaning and values related to their actions simply by observing them. In order

to understand behavior and have a deeper understanding of the situation, one must ask questions.

Asking questions enables the researcher to better understand and become familiar with the situation being studied and why the person behaves in a certain way in that setting. Patton (2002) claims, "The purpose of interviewing is to allow interviewers to enter into another person's perspective and work situation. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumptions that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and can be made explicit. A qualitative interview discovers what is in and on someone else's mind, to gather their stories" (p. 341).

The study used Merriam's (2002) "semi-structured interview format." The semi-structured interview contains a mix of more or less structured questions. It enabled the researcher to prepare a topical outline with corresponding questions in advance yet still respond flexibly to the unfolding situation (Merriam, 2002). The study used research questions to develop and organize an interview guide; however, the exact order of questions included in the outline was not decided until the interview unfolded (Patton, 2002). The interview questions were designed to be open-ended. This permitted respondents to share information and insights that may greatly vary with the assurance that a consistent approach to the interviews was taken.

The interview questions began with general questions (e.g., the participants were asked to describe their perspective of the strategic planning process, their involvement in the implementation of the plans and challenges they faced with regard to its implementation of the plan) and moved to more specific topics (e.g., they were asked to describe if the plan was fully implemented and if not why not, constraints faced such as

support from top level leaders, finance, and also some of the specific changes they experienced within the organization on account of implementing the strategic plan). Asking specific and focused questions enabled the researcher to collect in depth information about the program.

By using a semi-structured format approach with open-ended questions, the researcher was able to explore topics with the participants in a manner similar to a natural conversation. It also ensured that the conversations did not deviate too far from the research topic and that key questions were answered. The interview guide included follow-up probes and questions, as needed, to maximize the richness of the data being obtained (Patton, 2002). These follow-up probes enabled the researcher to further clarify areas that needed more information.

Each interview lasted about an hour and at the end of the interview, the researcher asked the interviewee if they could be contacted again for further discussion, if necessary. The follow up interviews were short and lasted from 20 to 30 minutes. Depending on the situation and need, some follow-up interviews were conducted through telephone and emails.

Recording is an important way of collecting and preserving raw data. It also helps in the data analysis. Patton (2002) claims that raw interview data are the actual quotations or information shared by interviewees. Nothing can substitute for these raw data: the actual things said by real people. Interviews were audio recorded in order to capture the raw data so that original quotes and specific terms used by the respondents in a particular environment were not lost.

Prior to interviewing, the respondents were asked for their permission to record the interview. The respondents were also told at the beginning of the interview that the researcher would respect their request to turn the tape recorder off at any time during the interview. This minimized the intrusive effects of such interviewing techniques and eliminated respondent's discomfort and anxieties. Additionally, the researcher took and maintained field notes to assist in providing a detailed account of the interviews. According to Patton (2002), maintaining field notes is a good habit and important especially when the tape recorder breaks down or malfunctions. However, Patton cautions that when the interviewer focuses too much on taking notes the person speaking only gets secondary attention.

Informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and the informed consent form indicated that, a copy of their interview transcript will be made available to them. Making transcriptions available to participants will provide them with the opportunity to look over the interviews and edit them, if appropriate (Rubin, 2005).

Analyzing Interview Data

Recorded interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriber. Data were transcribed within 48 hours following each interview which ensured optimal accuracy. This rapid transcription of data also enabled the interviewer to plan and make changes for the next interview. According to Rubin (2005), transcribing data helps the researcher to find those areas that need follow up and more detail, to clarify certain terms and words and to plan for the future interviews.

After the interview data were transcribed and then coded. Coding is the process of moving from raw interviews to evidenced-based interpretations that are the foundation

for the published report. According to Rubin (2005), “The coding process entails classifying, comparing, weighing, and combining materials from the interviews to extract the meaning and implications, to reveal patterns, or to put together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative” (p. 201).

The researcher coded the data from each interview in order to establish informational categories and to identify factors that relate to the primary questions that guide this study. Some of the initial coding categories that were used while analyzing data were: stakeholders’ perceptions of the strategic planning process and their role in the planning process, methods and approaches used for selection of the facilitator and committee members, parts of the plan not implemented, reasons for not implementing it, and factors that facilitated and challenged the implementation of the plan.

Coding was done soon after each interview was transcribed. Based on this ongoing coding process, the researcher modified questions and prepared follow-up questions to pursue emerging ideas. After the interviews were completed, the researcher then examined all the interviews together to pull out coherent and consistent descriptions, themes, and theories that address the research question. After patterns and themes are identified and abstract conceptualizations were created for each case, the researcher created a “unified description across cases” to “build abstractions across cases” (Merriam, 2002).

The analysis of data had different parts. The first part of the analysis was a description of each case and emergent qualitative theme within the case. In the second part, the study analyzed and described qualitative themes across the cases. In the third part, the researcher conducted a comparative study of both the organizations to identify

elements that facilitated and inhibited the implementation of strategic planning in their organization.

Document Analysis

During the interview process, the researcher gathered and analyzed various documents, particularly the ones related to previous strategic planning efforts and implementation and evaluation strategies. The analysis of documents was used to triangulate responses and other pertinent information provided by the interview respondents. This analysis also provided detailed descriptions of respondent information and, ultimately, a better understanding and confirmation of the research findings.

For purposes of data triangulation, documents pertaining to and describing strategic planning and the implementation process in the organization were reviewed. Also reviewed were the board or staff meeting minutes and records, especially with regard to the implementation processes. This sort of document review provided more insight into the impact of strategic plans in the organization. Analysis of these documents provided a clearer picture of the organization as opposed to relying solely on the information shared by the respondents.

The following are some additional documents that were collected and analyzed: brochures, board minutes, annual reports, magazine and newspaper articles, previous strategic plans, implementation plans, and evaluation reports. According to Patton (2002), documents and program records can provide a behind-the-scenes look at program processes and how they came into being and how they were being implemented. Patton further states that documents are one aspect of the sense making activities through which we reconstruct, sustain, contest, and change our sense of social reality. Though

documents play an important role in understanding the inner mind of the organization, Patton reminds us of certain challenges in analyzing those documents:

1. Getting access to documents
2. Understanding why and how the documents were produced
3. Determining the accuracy of the documents
4. Linking documents with other sources, including interviews and observation
5. Deconstructing and demystifying institutional texts. (p. 499)

Documents provide history and development of the organization over the period of time. Since such documents are internal to the organization, they can help better understand the organization and also compare and analyze the interviews.

Member Checking Procedures

At the conclusion of the study, the researcher prepared summaries of the findings for each organization and shared the summary of findings for each organization with two of the organization members who had been interviewed. After they read the summary, the following questions were asked:

1. Is there anything in this summary of my findings that you believe is incorrect or exaggerated?
2. Are there things mentioned here that you think are really important in understanding what happened during the planning and implementation processes in your organization?
3. Is there anything that should have been mentioned that was not discussed in this brief summary?

4. In what way will the findings help to improve the future planning and implementation of strategic planning in the organization?
5. Do you have any other comments about the summary of findings?

The final part of the findings chapter summarizes the responses to these questions.

Significance of the Study

Planning, whether short term, long term, or strategic, is an important part of any organization. It gives direction and purpose to the organization. Therefore, it is important to understand the development of a plan and its implementation process in organizations. The research study will enable organizations, leaders and other stakeholders to understand the development of plans, the implementation process, and the elements that enable organizations to achieve its purpose. The comparative study of two nonprofit organizations will help to understand the elements that facilitated and inhibited the implementation of strategic plans in those organizations. The study can ultimately serve as a possible guide for those organizations involved in such initiatives and also organizations that intend to initiate strategic plans in their organization.

Often, organizations spend a lot of money, time, and resources in formulating strategic plans, but seldom are those plans effectively implemented because many of those organizations do not have an implementation outline. This study enabled leaders to understand the importance of a planned implementation process in order to make plans that will actually achieve their purpose.

Lastly, through this study, the researcher provided leaders and others a rich source of information and structure for a purposeful implementation of strategic planning in their own organizations. The study might help organizations, particularly those that have

limited resources, plan and prioritize their programs and use their limited resources meaningfully in order to achieve maximum benefit.

Limitations and Assumptions of the Study

This study had a few limitations. First, the study was limited to only two nonprofit organizations. This limits the generalizability of its finding to other nonprofit as well as for-profit organizations that are involved in the strategic planning process. However, the results may possibly be used to conduct in-depth research studies in the future.

Second, the researcher's biases also need to be considered when collecting data and reviewing the findings, as the researcher was involved in the strategic planning processes in different organizations in India. The success of plans was of great concern in those organizations due to lack of money and resources. This experience motivated the researcher to explore the topic further as a research study.

Based on this researcher's experience and cultural background, various assumptions might be made in this study. The researcher might assume that strategic plans were often done due to pressure from donors, to raise funds, and to find solutions to an organization's problems. Also, it might be assumed that plans are often not fully implemented due to the lack of involvement of staff members and resources in organizations.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS: CASE ONE

Background Information of Migrants Rehabilitation and Development

Migrants Rehabilitation and Development (MRD) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to caring for survivors of politically motivated torture and their families who live in Southern California. The organization was started in 1997 and has grown from a small group of three volunteers operating out of the home of one of the volunteers to a group with a full-time staff of ten and a well-equipped office where direct services are provided to clients. Since its inception, the organization has assisted more than 800 torture survivors from more than 60 countries to recover from their traumas through a holistic program of medical, dental, psychiatric and psychological assistance, as well as legal and social services. The organization empowers torture survivors to reclaim the strength and vitality that was taken from them by their oppressors. In short, the organization's goal is to help the torture survivors become self-sufficient and healthy members of their families and communities.

In addition to aiding victims of torture, MRD's mission has two other components: (a) raise awareness among the general public and educate the professional communities about torture and (b) serve as an instrument to end torture. Operationally, these two components of the organization's three-part mission translate into a number of different educational efforts.

In order to achieve the organization's mission, staff members make speeches and presentations to academic, religious and community groups. In these presentations, staff members share their knowledge of the devastating effects of torture and the benefits of treatment. MRD also networks with like-minded organizations, interest groups, and

policy makers to raise the visibility of the plight of torture victims. It also works in collaboration with the local, state and national governments to advocate on behalf of torture survivors and against the use of torture.

In addition, in order to achieve other parts of the mission, the organization offers either directly or through its network of service providers, a wide variety of services to help torture survivors in San Diego County. MRD provides services such as legal collaboration and asylum support, psychotherapy, medical care, interpretation services, social services, case management, and professional training. All these services are provided at no cost to the clients because most of the clients are poor. With a nexus of specialized care and support, the organization is able to help torture survivors heal and improve their quality of life.

Local and state governments have recognized the organization's work. MRD has become an accredited member of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims, as well as a founding member of the National Consortium of Torture Treatment Programs and the California Consortium of Torture Treatment Centers.

Background Information About Strategic Planning at MRD

The organization's founding period was characterized by a struggle to make a difference with three volunteers and minimal programs. Organizations around the country similar to MRD initially advised MRD's staff that start-up might be slow and difficult because—in addition to the community's hesitation to support such programs—there is also a reluctance of victims to come forth and accept help from the organization. Yet, despite the humble beginning and advice from other organizations to move slowly, MRD actually grew fast because there was a great need for its programs. In fact, by the time the

organization developed its first strategic plan, which covered the years 1999 through 2001, the organization was assisting over 100 clients, even though the organization had only been in existence for 15 months. The rapid growth led the board of directors of MRD to create and implement the organization's first strategic plan in order to provide better services to its clients. Up to the time of this study, MRD had developed two additional strategic plans. Details about each of these plans are presented below.

The First Strategic Plan

The first strategic plan was created to cover a three-year span, from 1999 through 2001. According to Carmen, the CEO, the first plan involved a committee of just five members, including herself and two consultants from Lutheran Immigration Refugees Services. She said, "We sat down over pizza one evening and pretty much were able to craft it and finalize it within a month... we held ourselves accountable to implement it. At that time we had no staff so it was ourselves who implemented it."

An analysis of the first plan reveals that the final document is very specific and includes a clear timeline for initiating specified activities, specifies tasks to be completed, details staff responsibilities for accomplishing specific tasks, and includes a timeframe for completing tasks. Carmen claimed that the plan's clearly specified time frame for task completion was the main reason for the successful implementation of the first strategic plan at MRD.

Bill, the Board president, also affirmed that the plan had been successfully executed within the specified time frame. He added the following comments about the first plan's successful implementation in a letter that helped introduce the organization's second plan:

The Board of Directors of MRD was quite surprised when we found that we had exceeded most of the goals we had set in our first three-year plan for the organization. In fact, we had hardly imagined the kind of growth we experienced as an organization over that period of time.

The Second Strategic Plan

The second plan was developed for a five-year period, from 2002 through 2006. This time, the now much larger and thriving organization hired a qualified external consultant to facilitate the planning process. According to Carmen, the consultant began the process with a substantial amount of preparatory work required from some of the board members and herself. While commenting on the preparation, Carmen said:

We talked to numerous stakeholders and asked key questions to them about the organization. We reported it when we gathered that morning [i.e., the morning of the first strategic planning meeting during a strategic planning retreat], and then we went through what is called 'A Strategic Mapping' and we looked at what currently was going on and what that would mean for us two years out, four years out, five years out and to use that as the context for our inevitable plan.

The planning process had a committee of 18 people. The group included three outside members who, Carmen indicated, had been selected to participate in the planning process because they were experienced in and knowledgeable about strategic planning.

The planning process began with a one-day retreat for all the committee members. The committee started its work by revisiting and somewhat modifying the mission of the organization. According to Carmen, "Modifying the organization's mission enabled the organization to respond to the changing environment external to the organization and the organization's own internal growth. At the end of the planning process, the organization identified five categories of tasks as its strategic directions for the next five years. These categories were: board development; financial resource development; advocacy and public relations, human resource, and professional contractor development."

All five directions had a specific timeline for implementation and particular staff assigned to implement them. Once again, the plan was very clear and specific, and, because of plan's specificity, Carmen said staff members knew exactly what was expected of them.

The Third Strategic Plan

The third planning process started in 2006. Like the organization's second plan, the plan generated by the third planning process covered a five-year period beginning in 2007. Because the staff member responsible for drafting the final document left the organization, an actual plan had not been completed by the time data were collected for this study in 2008. At the time of the study, however, a new employee was completing the task of writing the plan that had been produced by the third planning process.

As was done during the development of the second plan, the planning process for the third plan also used an external consultant to facilitate planning activities. Carmen said that the facilitator was an expert in the field of strategic planning and had considerable experience in facilitating strategic planning. The planning process was divided into different phases.

In the first phase of the planning process, a timeline for the planning process was developed and a task force was established. The task force was charged with coordinating the planning process and gathering data. It was comprised of eight members including three board members, three staff, and two external community members. All eight of members of the task force also were on the 13-member planning committee. The task force was responsible for collecting and disseminating information to the planning committee.

In the second phase of the planning process, the consultant conducted a one-day retreat for the committee members. During the retreat, he explained the purpose of the planning process and identified areas and issues that required further discussion and exploration.

The third phase was called the data-gathering phase. The task force gathered data and discussed it with the committee. Additionally, the consultant gathered data by meeting with all the staff individually and some of the important stakeholders including donors and service providers. These meetings were an opportunity for the staff members who were not on the strategic planning committee to share information on the organization's strengths, limitations, opportunities, and threats. The consultant summarized the information while keeping the identities of the respondents confidential.

During the interview, some of the staff with whom the consultant met indicated that they welcomed this part of the process and considered the consultant a neutral observer. Therefore, staff members had no hesitation in sharing information with him. This process not only encouraged staff members to share information and participate in the process, but it also resulted in the production of a significant amount of useful information.

In phase four, the consultant organized a work session for the task force members and the Board of Directors. Based on the vision of the organization and information collected during the data-gathering phase, the task force members spent the day deciding on priorities. Then, those priorities, once again, were divided into five directional statements. These directional statements were then developed into a draft of the strategic plan with goals, measurable objectives, and timelines.

Stakeholders' General Perspectives of the Strategic Plans

In this section of the paper, the researcher will discuss stakeholders' perspectives of strategic planning and the strategic plans at MRD. Some interviewees had participated in the development of all three plans, or at least worked under all three. Others were directly familiar with only one or two plans. In most cases, individuals did not indicate to which plan or planning process they were referring. Even if they were familiar with more than the recent plan—which, of course, had not even been officially written at the time of the study—they tended to talk about strategic planning in the organization and the organization's strategic plan fairly generically. Of course, when the topic shifted to implementation of the plans, it is likely that interviewees were speaking of the implementation of the first and/or second plans, since the new plan—which, as noted, was not even in final draft form—was only beginning to be implemented when the interviews were conducted.

The Strategic Plan as a Living Document

Three of the six interviewees emphasized that, in this organization (MRD), the strategic plan was more than words written on paper. Rather, as the quotations in Table 4.1 indicate, the three interviewees described the strategic plan as something that was “lived on a daily basis; an animate and changing process rather than a static and inanimate object.”

Table 4.1: Strategic Plan Being a Living Document

Michael	The strategic plan is a living document and integration of the plan helps us understand our responsibilities and the implementation process. It will remain a living document only if we are actually consciously thinking of it, reading it periodically and integrating it with our work.
Carmen	By integrating it into employees' daily work and the overall nature of the organization, we make this document a living document.
Vicky	The strategic plan is more of a breathing document and it gives life. The staff must make it a breathing document by giving life to it instead of filing it in a cupboard and looking for it when there is a need or the organization is in trouble.

Feeling of Ownership of the Plan

Another important perspective of staff about the strategic plan, a perspective that was articulated by three of the six interviewees, involved the sense of ownership that members of the organization had about the plan. In order for the staff and the other key stakeholders to use the plan, these respondents stated, staff members and stakeholders must feel ownership of the plan. At MRD there was a feeling of ownership among those interviewed after all, they made it.

Carmen, in particular, emphasized that a feeling of ownership made implementation easier. Two other interviewees also commented on their sense of ownership of the plan, and they agreed with Carmen that a feeling of ownership made implementation easier in part because ownership reinforced a sense of purpose. Table 4.2 provides opinions of these three interviewees regarding their feeling of ownership of the plans.

Table 4.2: Feeling of Ownership

Mark	When I see the document, I can see my suggestions, and it makes me happy and motivates me.
Carmen	In order for the staff and other key stakeholders to use the plan, they need to own it and feel that it is their plan and they made it.
Tony	There was a sense of ownership among staff during the process and feeling that it was their plan and they made it, and it did not come from me or from the CEO.

The Strategic Plans Provided Direction

Four of the six respondents emphasized that the strategic plans provided them direction, and they stated that the plans put the staff “on the same page.” Michael said it helped MRD employees work for a common goal, and it also gave them a sense of purpose and commitment. Table 4.3 provides the opinions of different interviewees about the value of strategic plans to provide them direction.

Table 4.3: Plans Providing Direction

Michael	The plan gives everybody a sense of direction for the next 5 years—we are doing this and we are not doing this.
Carmen	Everybody was scrambling in a lot of different directions and the plan showed the right direction.
Lora	It is important to step back every few years and look at where we've been, where we're going, and I think a strategic plan is important in an organization's life. [If an organization does not have a clear direction] All of a sudden you could be lost and going down the wrong path and you are wondering how did that happen?
Tony	Strategic plans give direction, [but] strategic plans should not be created to remedy organizational problems and find solutions to its immediate crisis.

The final person listed on table 4.3 was the external facilitator. As his comments recorded in table 4.3 suggest, he agreed with Michael and other respondents that the plans provided direction to reach organizational goals; however, he cautioned that plan is not a tool to find solutions to its problems. He said, “Plans should not be created to tackle an

organization's problems but problems must be tackled before strategic planning is initiated."

Based on the literature and researcher's experience with many nonprofit organizations, it appears to be a truism that organizations often initiate strategic planning as a response to crises, financial, change in leadership, or otherwise. From the external facilitator's perspective, it is not a good idea to facilitate strategic planning when the organization is in crisis. A crisis situation certainly did not appear to be the motive behind any of the strategic plans in MRD.

The Strategic Plans Enabled Streamlining

Mark, a senior staff member, and Vicky, a board representative, said that MRD's strategic plans enabled their organization to streamline programs and stay focused on the organization's identified priorities. For instance, while elaborating on this point, Mark said, "Money is available for many programs, but we don't take it. We only take money if it falls within our mission. It [the strategic plan] helps us to streamline our funding." According to them, strategic plans enabled them to accept programs and funds that fall within the organization's mission. They said that the plans helped them determine which programs are in alignment with the mission.

Respondents' Perspective of the Strategic Planning Process

In this section of the paper, the researcher will discuss the respondents' perspectives on some of the factors that aided in the development of the plan. The focus in this section is on the process and not the final product. The factors that are reported in this section are mainly about the last two planning processes because these plans were

completed recently and most of the participants were either on the committee or participated in some way in the planning process.

While discussing the planning process(es), respondents tended to talk about two factors—the planning committee and the external facilitator. Both these factors were seen as making significant contributions to the planning process. This section, therefore, will be organized around these two topics. The factors that enabled the planning process were: planning committee and external facilitator.

Planning Committee

All three plans at MRD were developed by some sort of planning committee. While the planning committee that developed the first plan was quite small (five individuals)—largely because the organization at that point was small—the current plan was developed by a committee of 13 people: the executive director, four staff members, three board representatives, two former board members, and three external participants.

According to Carmen, the external participants were chosen for their association with the organization and their knowledge about its programs. They also had experience and expertise in the field of strategic planning. Regarding selection of planning one of the committee members, Michael, said:

Different points of view in the community were represented and that was a conscious choice. I think they were selected for their knowledge of the agency, knowledge of the issues, and knowledge of the community. So, that conscious choice brought us both internal and external points of view so that we could be sure we weren't missing something.

Mark also indicated that the entire planning committee exhibited diversity of different sorts, “You need different eyes looking at the plan,” Mark stated, “because different people are going to spot different weaknesses in the plan. Different people have

different ideas and levels of competence in different areas.” Mark did, however, suggest that all of this diversity might have had a high price. He actually recommended using a smaller planning committee in the future and said, “You do not want too big a group, otherwise you have too many voices and it becomes unwieldy.”

Other respondents did not comment on the size of the committee but they agreed that MRD had a balanced committee. According to virtually all respondents, a balanced committee means that the planning group will represent the interests of the organization’s stakeholders, including the clients that the organization serves. Michael agreed with other members that MRD had a balanced committee and, recognizing the importance of such balance, he said:

Otherwise you would have a narrow perspective of things and you could miss some things because, SCY you only had the staff and the Board writing the plan. You might miss some things that are not known to you because you have your limited point of experience. I think a committee that is diverse and also that is specifically responsible for this task is a good idea.

Table 4.4 summarizes some of what respondents said about the planning committee and, in some cases, what they said about the importance of having a balanced committee when developing a strategic plan.

Table 4.4: Planning Committee

Michael	The planning committee members were selected for knowledge of the agency, knowledge of the issues, and knowledge of the community and the people the organization serves.
Mark	Different eyes looking at the plan is good because different people are going to spot different weaknesses in the plan.
Lora	It is a mixed group of people and people with different experience and knowledge.
Carmen	They are people with knowledge and experience on the topic and can bring in a wider perspective.
Vicky	Informal criteria such as experience, knowledge, and programs or departments that the staff represented were used while selecting the planning committee members.
Tony	External members had knowledge about the organizations and its programs and they brought rich experience. The committee was small, but was carefully chosen for their knowledge and expertise in the field of strategic planning.

External Facilitator

As stated above, MRD hired an external facilitator to assist with the development of the third strategic plan. This facilitator was involved throughout the planning process and, to some extent, in the implementation of the plan—providing training and evaluations. The CEO and the board member emphasized the importance of having an external consultant to facilitate the planning process. The CEO said that he helped the committee to reflect critically and kept them focused on the objectives. She said, “It is helpful initially to have someone from the outside with more expertise...He (or she) is like a mirror.” Vicky, the board member said, “The consultant helped us focus on a certain direction, and helped us problem-solve what we needed to do, and to move forward with it.” A frontline staff member, while commenting on the importance of external facilitator said, “Sometimes we are so caught up in our own little office and

having the ‘outsider perspective’ would certainly be an advantage, especially people with knowledge and experience in the field of strategic planning.”

The staff respondents said that the facilitator was neutral and an expert on the topic of strategic planning. He met with all the staff members individually during the planning process. Michael said that these meetings helped the staff members share their ideas and contribute to the process without fear or reservation. Vicky said:

The facilitator was very objective and he helped us see the strengths and the weaknesses that the board members had, that the staff had, that the organization had and really helped us to focus on some of those things that we needed to strengthen and the things that are really good about the organization.

Factors That Facilitated and Inhibited the Implementation Process

The overarching purpose of this section is to discuss the factors that facilitated and inhibited the implementation of strategic plans at MRD. The factors that are analyzed in these two sections are mainly about the first two plans, because the third plan is new and the organization is in process of implementing it.

Factors Which Facilitated the Implementation of the Strategic Plans

The factors that were identified by the participants as those that facilitated implementation of strategic plans at MRD were: leadership, effective communication system, timeline, the final written document, and smaller size of the organization.

Leadership. All six respondents acknowledged the importance of leadership as a contributor to the effective implementation of strategic plans, and they recognized the leadership role of their CEO. While commenting on the roles of an effective leader, the respondents said that an effective leader with a clear vision connects with people, reaches

out, and works in collaboration with the organization and community. He or she communicates his or her vision, and he or she is committed and motivates the staff to work as a team to achieve the goals of the organization. Lora, a frontline staff respondent, acknowledged that her CEO was a visionary leader and she said that the CEO provided opportunities for creativity. The CEO appreciated and rewarded creative work and creative thinking in the organization. Michael said that his CEO kept the plan on track and commenting on her leadership role he said:

The strategic plan can be so involved and can lead in so many directions that if you don't have someone keeping the whole process on track towards its conclusion, both in terms of the production of the plan and the time in which to produce it, you could go on forever and not really get to the end.

According to Mark, "[The leader constantly reminded the staff that] we are doing these things because this is what we decided we needed to do as an agency." Mark said that as a leader Carmen was very much involved with the plan and she motivated others to follow it. Table 4.5 provides examples of what different interviewees said about the role of MRD's executive director in the strategic plan implementation.

Table 4.5: Role of the Executive Director in Implementation of Strategic Plans

Michael	<p>She is conscious with a clear vision of organizational process and she brings a lot of conscious awareness about why you do things, how you do things.</p> <p>She takes [plan] it very seriously and she understands the state of the art, we might SCY, in how to do that; how you do it; why you do it.</p>
Mark	<p>Carmen is so focused on the organization and on running the organization that she has all this stuff in her head; and one way or another she follows the strategic plan.</p>
Lora	<p>[The executive director] she is consistent, hard working and sets example to others.</p> <p>We see her passion for this work. She has also stressed the importance of having a plan like this. I think she firmly believes that [plans] it is kind of key to an organization.</p>
Vicky	<p>She knows who the key players are in the community. She knows how to get things done, how to connect with people to get things done.</p> <p>She knows things. She is there to do it and motivates others to do it.</p>
Tony	<p>She works very well with the board and the staff. She is a link.</p>

Communication. According to respondents, communication is another important element that contributed to the effective implementation of the organization's strategic plans. Lora said that communication clarifies roles and responsibilities such as who is doing what and when. Michael said that communication at MRD is "fast" because the organization uses the Internet, staff meetings, and individual conferences to communicate the process and implementation of strategic plans with the staff and other stakeholders. Lora acknowledged the effective use of emails and the Internet and said that this was the main reason for the effective implementation of the plans.

The organization also has a quarterly newsletter and Lora, the editor of the newsletter, said that the newsletter connects the organization and the plans with the clients and local community. Acknowledging the effectiveness of communication, Vicky

suggested that communication concerning strategic plans must begin even before the planning process is initiated and she said that it must be ongoing.

The respondents agreed that staff meetings are an effective forum for information sharing concerning the strategic plan and the implementation of that plan. According to Lora, the reason for using staff meetings is twofold: First, meetings are held frequently; second, sharing at staff meetings emphasizes the seriousness of the plan and, according to her sharing and discussions at staff meetings is an effective way of reminding the people about the importance of sticking to the plan. Table 4.6 provides comments from two additional interviewees about the importance of communication during the implementation of a strategic plan.

Table 4.6: Comments on Communication

Michael	It [Communication] clarifies things as to who is doing what and the timeline. Email is an easy way of communicating among staff.
Vicky	The staff and other stakeholders must be regularly communicated about the process and it must be ongoing. It helps them understand the status of the plan and their role with regard to implementation of the plan.

Final written document. The respondents all said that the final document that resulted from the planning process was clear and easy to understand, and it was filled with specifics that took the form of highlighted bullet points. While commenting on the final written document, Michael, a senior staff member, said: “The final document is very concrete and specific, and discrete activities are described” and commenting on its specificity, he said. “[The plan did not say] develop fund raising [rather it said] develop fund raising in these particular ways, who does it and in what timeline.”

Mark, another senior staff member, agreed that the plan was specific and said, “The document attracts and motivates people to read, especially the frontline staff.” Mark emphasized that the document is not only used by a few staff members or by the management team but by the entire organization. Therefore, Mark said that it must be clearly written in a way that everyone in the organization is able to use it and understand the plan, their particular responsibilities, and the implementation timeline.

Some respondents said the copies of the final document were easily available to staff members and concrete efforts such as discussing it in staff meetings and retreats were taken to integrate the plan with the activities of the organization. The respondents believed that integrating the plan with daily work and discussing and reviewing it during staff meetings brought life to the document. Carmen said that such measures made it a “living document.” It is unlikely that the document would have come to life if it had not been written in a clear and understandable manner.

Four of the six respondents talked favorably about the final document and they appreciated the style of its presentation. Vicky, a board respondent and Lora, a staff representative, did not specifically talk about the nature of the final document. But, in general, they all agreed that the final document must be clearly written and easy for the staff—especially for the frontline staff—to understand and implement. Table 4.7 provides examples of what different interviewees said about the final written document.

Table 4.7: Final Document

Michael	The style of the document is very good, concrete, specific; discrete activities described, and the way it's written was easy for staff to understand.
Mark	The document is precise and specific and it attracts and motivates people to read especially the low frontline staff. The entire organization must know the plan, read it and integrate it with their activities.
Carmen	The document was comprehensive and user friendly.... with many tasks underneath. It was easy for the staff to read and assimilate and it helped the staff a lot as they are busy with their daily work. Plans such as ours motivate staff to use it because it is short and it is connected with their work.
Tony	A little less detail at the Board level would be helpful and then have more detail at the staff level so that the Board doesn't lose focus as you SCY and the staff have a clear picture.

Small size of the organization. MRD is a small organization. The staff members know the organization, its staff, and its programs. They said that staff retention is higher at MRD than in most nonprofit organizations, especially larger ones, because the organization is deeply mission-oriented and the atmosphere at the work place is friendly. Michael said that such a friendly atmosphere provides employees with work satisfaction even though the salary and other benefits are low.

Another important aspect of MRD is that its client population is that it is small and stable. Lora said that stable client population makes it easier for the organization to keep track of its clients and to provide them better services. According to Carmen, it is easier and more efficient to plan and implement programs in a smaller organization. The respondents claimed that the stability of the client population helps the organization provide better services on a continuous basis.

One identified disadvantage of being a small organization—small organizations like MRD often are not well known in the community. The respondents said that this lack

of visibility affects their efforts to mobilize funds and make its programs known or available to deserving people in the community. Table 4.8 provides comments of different interviewees about the size of the organization and how size facilitates and inhibits implementation of strategic plans.

Table 4.8: Size of the Organization

Michael	[In a small organization] staff members know what is happening.
Mark	MRD is a small organization and it is not much known in the community.
Lora	The organization is small, the staff members know one another and they are committed to the organization. Several people on staff have been here for five, seven, ten years because they like the work and the work environment is friendly.
Carmen	Our client population is more or less the same. It is easier to plan our programs and budget if clients are stable.

Specific timeline. The strategic plans at MRD have a clear timeline, and Michael said that the clear timeline makes the staff accountable and it gives them focus and clarity to roles. The timeline, in short, keeps the organization and the staff on track. While commenting on timeline, Michael said that the plans identify what needs to be completed each quarter as well as a final due date for completing it.

Five of the six respondents emphasized the importance of a timeline for implementing a strategic plan, and they claimed that the plans at MRD had a clear timeline. They said that the clear timeline was one of the major reasons for the successful implementation of strategic plan. Lora called a strategic plan's timeline a blueprint that provides direction about who is doing what and when. Table 4.9 provides examples of what different interviewees said about the importance of timeline and its effectiveness in the successful implementation of strategic plans.

Table 4.9: Timeline

Michael	It keeps people accountable for producing what they need to do and move to the next step. It keeps the focus on what we need to produce.
Mark	It helps in the sense that if you have an aggressive timeline and we have some in here, we may need to put more people on that action item; so more people may need to be involved so that it can be done more quickly.
Lora	It is a blueprint and it tells you who's responsible, what the timeline is, what the metrics are.
Carmen	The timeline helped the board to remain focused and stay on target and helped us make sure of boards' roles and responsibilities.
Tony	Timeline is helpful so that the Board has some ability to compare the accomplishment of the plans' goals with its own evaluation cycle.

Factors Which Inhibited the Implementation Process

In this section of the paper the researcher will discuss the factors that were identified as inhibiting the implementation of strategic plan at MRD. The factors included a high workload, limited funds, and high staff turnover.

Workload. Workload is a major concern at MRD. Michael and Mark, the senior managers, said that, due to demanding day-to-day tasks, it was rather challenging—not entirely impossible—to keep track of the strategic plan or pay much attention to it. They agreed that if proper attention is not paid, plans could be sidelined and neglected. Michael said, “If you are not keeping this living document alive, you can forget about it as you get caught up in your daily responsibilities.” Mark agreed with Michael and said that if organizations do not use the plan regularly it will not create much impact and will be soon forgotten.

The concern over workload did not come up during interviews either with the MRD or the frontline staff. However, it appeared to be a major concern at the senior staff level. One explanation is that this organization did not appear to have enough qualified staff. As a result, the senior level staff members were overwhelmed with their work.

Frontline staff members were inadequately qualified to take on some of the senior staff members' responsibilities. Michael and Mark recognized this and said that such a situation adds to their workload and hampers implementation of plans. Table 4.10 provides the views of the CEO and the two senior staff respondents about workload and how workload affects the implementation of strategic plan at MRD.

Table 4.10: Workload

Michael	It is hard to keep on track with the plan because the tasks of day-to-day life can be so demanding.
Mark	Workload hinders the proper use of a strategic plan and it is hard to think anything other than what you are doing.
Carmen	If you are not keeping this living document alive, you can forget about it as you get caught up in daily work.

Limited funds. All six respondents mentioned money as a major concern to the organization. A lack of predictable funds inhibits planning and implementation of plans. MRD largely depends on federal assistance, and according to respondents, the problem with federal funding is that it tends to vary due to changes in politics and policies. Moreover, there is no guarantee that federal funding for particular initiatives will continue forever. Michael said that it is hard to plan under these circumstances.

According to Carmen, it is becoming harder for a small organization like MRD to get federal funding due to mounting competition from other organizations. It is harder because MRD does not have qualified staff members to write proposals or do follow up with donor agencies.

Carmen and Vicky said that the organization is not very successful in raising funds locally because of the controversial nature of the organization's work. The organization works with torture victims. Many of them are immigrants, and the local

community is hesitant to support the cause financially. Since it is a challenge to raise funds locally, the organization is obliged to depend on government funding. Table 4.11 provides examples of what different interviewees said about funds and how inadequate and unstable funding affects the implementation of strategic plan.

Table 4.11: Funds

Michael	<p>Funding is a problem but what guides the flow of funds and its effective utilization is strategic planning.</p> <p>Money is a big concern, especially for small organizations like MRD. It has to do with not only getting or having money, but also having the infrastructure with which to get the money and the staffing and also their ability to implement it.</p>
Mark	<p>We are very dependent on government funding...that could be a real challenge if funding fell through, then a lot of what we are trying to do may fall off the face of the map.</p>
Lora	<p>Because of change in government policies and cutting down funds, the organization had to make many predictions.</p>
Carmen	<p>We largely depend on federal grants and if grants are not available, we would have to cut staff and that is always hard and it affects the continuity and the momentum of work.</p>
Vicky	<p>We can have many plans but if we do not have the resources to implement, it will never get implemented.</p>
Tony	<p>Money is limited and there are more organizations competing for the limited resources and organizations that compete survive.</p>

Staff turnover. Carmen said that staff resignations are quite common at MRD and that they affect the organization and the continuity of its work. According to her, the reasons for high turnover are inadequate compensation, lack of pay raises, and the lack of employment security. She said staff leaving the organization affects not only the organization and the continuity of work in general, but also the implementation of plans in particular. For instance, according to Michael, writing the final draft of the third plan was delayed. It was delayed because the person in charge of drafting the document had resigned. MRD had to wait until another person was appointed to have a written plan.

This delay—which lasted for several months—delayed the implementation of the plan. As per the initial timeline, the planning process and writing of the final draft should have been completed in one year; instead it took over two years to complete.

The person who eventually completed the document said that such a delay could impact the morale and enthusiasm of the people. While commenting on the delay and the reactions of the staff members, Michael said, “Staff might say ‘the strategic plan, what is it? Who is responsible? We heard about it a few years ago and we don’t know what is happening to it.’” Table 4.12 provides examples of what Michael and Mark, two senior managers said about staff turnover and how it affects implementation of the plan.

Table 4.12: Staff Turnover

Michael	Finding the right person is a difficult thing and also very important to retain that person which is hard because of financial instabilities.
Mark	MRD being a small organization, its budget is tight and it is not able to provide regular merit increases in salaries.

Recommendations for the Future

In this section of the paper, the researcher will analyze some of the recommendations that respondents provided about improving the strategic planning process and implementation of strategic plans in future. Themes that emerged include the value of: conducting a periodic evaluation of the plan, establishing an implementing committee, improving communication, and providing training.

Periodic Evaluation

MRD does not have a clear system or a time bounded way of evaluating their plans. Therefore, all respondents, except Vicky, the board representative, recommended a periodic evaluation of the plan. Michael suggested that an evaluation should be

completed once every six months. According to him, “[The purpose of the evaluation is] to help the organization make changes that need to be made in the plan or any modifications necessary to get there and it keeps people on track.” He further said, “Evaluation helps you know who is doing what and when you are fulfilling your duties.” Lora also recommended periodic evaluations of plans and said, “It is important to step back every few years and look at where we've been, where we're going, and I think it's important in an organization's life for a committee to evaluate the plan.” She said, “All of a sudden you could be lost and going down the wrong path and you are wondering how did that happen?” According to respondents, if a clear and time bound system of evaluation is in place it will prevent the organization from going down the wrong path.

Carmen also emphasized the importance of evaluation and she said: “Evaluation helps organizations to adjust their programs according to the changing needs of its clients.” Tony, the external consultant, also recommended evaluations. However, he cautioned: “Evaluation should not be seen as a blaming process ... but a system to monitor the progress that the organization is going in, and evaluate its strategies as how effective its strategies are.” He said: “[Evaluations help organizations to critically analyze their existing strategies and its effectiveness and ask questions such as] are these strategies still relevant or do we follow something different?” According to him, periodic evaluations help organizations bring necessary changes if the existing strategies do not work or need to be changed to better respond to a changing environment.

To summarize, five of the six respondents emphasized the need for a periodic evaluation of plans. With the exception of Michael, no one specified how often plans

should be evaluated. Table 4.13 provides examples of what different interviewees said about evaluation.

Table 4.13: Evaluation

Michael	<p>The evaluation committee must meet every six months, get the plan, talk about where we are with this goal; if we're not there, what should we do; if we are there, great; any changes that need to be made or any modifications necessary to get there.</p> <p>Evaluation would help by keeping people on track. It also helps you know who is doing what and when you are fulfilling your duties.</p>
Mark	<p>We have to view this as a living document...this is a projection of the future. We don't know what the future is going to be so we have to realize that we may have to tinker with this. May be one way of handling is evaluation.</p>
Lora	<p>It is important to step back every few years and look at where we've been, where we're going, and I think it's important in an organization's life.</p> <p>All of the sudden you could be lost and going down the wrong path and you're wondering how did that happen? But this prevents that from happening.</p>
Carmen	<p>Evaluation helps them to adjust programs according to the needs of its clients.</p>
Tony	<p>Evaluation should not be seen as a blaming process...rather, to really monitor the progress of the organization and to evaluate strategy.</p>

Implementing Committee

MRD does not have an implementing committee to monitor the implementation of plans. Instead, it has a management team. The team is fairly new, and, according to the respondents, the management team is the product of the organization's second strategic plan. The management team consists of key staff members in the organization: the executive director, two senior staff, and two frontline staff members. According to Carmen, the team not only monitors the implementation of strategic plans but monitors other programs as well.

Michael spoke about the importance of having some type of group to monitor the implementation process. He said: "It's a five-year plan and it has some goals. Some

committees should meet maybe every six months in a formal way and reflect where we are on each of these goals.”

Mark also indicated the advisability of a group monitoring process for plan implementation. He suggested: “[The committee must constantly ask] are we going to be on time, if not, what effect does this have on other things and what resources are needed to do it.” He further said: “It [an implementation committee] is not only to supervise, but also mobilize and allocate resources in order to do the work. What program needs our immediate attention and resources?”

Because the organization has a management team, the respondents did not recommend that another committee to implement the plan be created. However, they all recognized the importance of tasking some group with the responsibility for monitoring the implementation process. Vicky, the board respondent, indicated appreciation for the work of the management team. She said, however, “The management team must work more closely with the board and the staff, particularly the person responsible for implementing and putting the plan together.”

Training

Carmen and the two senior staff respondents acknowledged that MRD does not provide sufficient training to its staff and other stakeholders. According to Carmen the reasons for this deficiency are: lack of funds, space, and workload. Tony, the consultant, recommended training for the staff and the board members. He suggested providing training at the beginning of the planning process and before and during the implementation of the plan. He said that training would help everybody understand the process and their responsibilities in the process; it also would give staff members focus

and direction. Lora, who was not on the planning committee, also emphasized the importance of training. She said that it would help the staff to better understand the plan and provide them with new techniques and directions that would be useful during the implementation phase.

Organizational Changes Brought About by Strategic Planning

MRD was originated in 1997 and since then it has been undertaking strategic planning on a regular basis. At the time of data collection, the organization was in the process of implementing its third plan. It is quite apparent from its annual reports, newsletters, and reports (project proposals) that MRD has grown over the period of time it has been in existence and that the successive plans have positively impacted the organization.

All respondents except the facilitator responded positively about the impact of the organization's strategic plans on MRD. The facilitator did not deny that the plans had had a positive impact. He simply lacked the knowledge to make explicit comments on the changes that had occurred to MRD over the years because he is new to the organization. Moreover he is not directly involved with the organization's activities on a day-to-day basis. However, referring to the nature of programs and growth of the organization, he said, "I see a significant change in the organization."

According to Michael, strategic plans have provided the organization with a clear direction. Carmen said that the plans have brought about three important changes in the organization: a clear focus, a methodical way of looking at activities and programs, and a way to keep the staff on the same page. She said that, because of the strategic plans, staff members are able to work towards a particular direction.

The respondents emphasized that the organization is becoming more known in the community and this has increased its connection with the local people. The result has been improved community participation and support for the organization. According to Vicky, the positive side to this is that the organization is now able to motivate more people to work as volunteers and mobilize funds locally. Vicky said, "People are becoming more aware of our programs and they are able to refer deserving people to avail our services." MRD's annual report-2008 indicates its growth and the fact that the organization currently serves around 500 clients.

According to respondents, another significant change that resulted from the strategic planning process was more robust networking and advocacy. As a result of the plans, the organization works in collaboration with similar locally based nonprofit organizations. Carmen said that networking helps the organizations share ideas and information; networked organizations also support one another in pursuit of their common goal. Carmen said that in alliance with these other organizations, MRD works for the rights of its clients and it raises awareness on the plight of torture victims locally and nationally. Carmen said that the state government recognized and awarded MRD's work among torture victims and she proudly said: "It [the recognition by the state government] is a big change for us."

As an outcome of the second strategic plan, the organization created a management team to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the plan and the same committee will also monitor the third and the future plan's implementation. According to Carmen, the team is comprised of key staff members and the CEO, and it meets once a

week. Carmen said that the committee monitors the implementation of programs and it gives direction to the staff members.

Participants in this study believe that the organization's three strategic plans played an important role in this growth. Table 4.14 provides examples of what different interviewees said about organization's growth and the changes that implementation of strategic plans brought about in the organization.

Table 4.14: Changes in the Organization

Michael	The plan is a road map that gives us direction about where to go and how to get there and where we want to go.
Mark	The plan has increased staff commitment to the organization and to its programs and to its mission. The organization is more known in the community and is able to market its programs.
Lora	Because I'm dealing with the public who wants to know where we're heading, what we're doing, who we're going to be serving, what we're looking for in terms of volunteers, or contractors, interpreters, and so to have this document to refer to is helpful.
Carmen	MRD has a management team and it facilitates the implementation process. The plan has brought about three major changes in the organization: a clear focus, a methodical way of looking at things, and keeping all the staff on the same page.
Vicky	The organization has grown over the period of time in areas such as financial independence, stronger programs, more qualified staff, and networking. Our advocacy is stronger, I think our connection with the community and government officials are significantly improved.

Summary

MRD is a small organization and it is in the process of implementing its third strategic plan. Though the organization is financially unstable, it has been doing strategic planning consistently, and all members of the organization who were interviewed indicated that the three strategic plans that have been developed were beneficial to the organization. The respondents acknowledged that the plans provided them with clarity of

focus, new directions, and opportunities to revisit and modify the organization's mission in order to effectively respond to the changing needs of clients and respond to changes in the environment.

The respondents claimed that MRD has been able to implement most of the recommendations on the first two plans and it is in the process of implementing the third plan. The study revealed that respondents felt that the following factors led to the effective implementation of plans: clear timeline, leadership, clarity of the final document, effective internal communication, and small size of the organization. All respondents acknowledged that their CEO played an important role in implementation of the plans. They stated that she was a role model and they appreciated her commitment to orchestrate the implementation of the plans.

Factors that inhibited the implementation of plans were: excessive workload; limited and inconsistent funding levels; and high staff turnover. Respondents said that MRD was able to continue and expand its mission. At the end of each interview, the researcher asked the respondents if they would recommend developing a new plan once the current plan was completed. They indicated they would support the next plan because it brought the entire organization together on the same page.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS: CASE TWO

Background Information of Social Concern for Youth

Social Concern for Youth (SCY) is a nonprofit organization based in Southern California. It was started in 1971 with financial support from the University of San Diego and the Local Junior League. Initial funding was provided by a loan from the San Francisco based Haigh Scatena Foundation. For the first year, the staff consisted of the Executive Director and a group of volunteers from the University of San Diego law school who provided a variety of support services for young persons facing legal adjudication and their families.

Initially the organization's programs were aimed at services to at-risk youth before they actually broke the law, rather than after they were in legal trouble. Both the City and County of San Diego supported this program and provided financial assistance that allowed the organization to employ its first staff member; a youth counselor.

By 1977, the organization had a budget of \$200,000. It employed more staff and expanded its programs. It provided services such as individual counseling, family counseling, alcohol abuse prevention programs, and school-oriented tutoring. The staff members also were beginning to develop capacity in the area of community development.

In 1977, the agency received a request from Murphy Canyon (e.g., a community near San Diego) to provide delinquency prevention services in the Murphy Canyon community. In response to this request, the organization opened a second office in Murphy Canyon to provide services. SCY later expanded its programs to other communities and established satellite facilities.

SCY also expanded its services into the mid-city area of San Diego to work with school children. The organization's work with schools became broader as programs such as the learning disabilities initiatives and homework clinics for children were added. SCY's before and after school child care services grew rapidly, and it has now extended this program to over 50 schools throughout the City of San Diego.

The espoused mission of SCY is: "To be a leader and a partner in providing accessible and quality services that are effectively planned and implemented to strengthen the emotional well being of San Diego's children, families, and communities" (Annual Report 2007-2008). As part of its mission, SCY provides a comprehensive and integrated array of services. It also builds collaborative partnerships for the cost-effective use of resources to benefit its clients, particularly children and families. It provides relevant, effective, and accessible services to families and children, in particular families and children who live in the most vulnerable sections of the community. The aim of the organization is strengthening the whole child, family, and community with a collaborative effort with other available community resources and service centers (Annual Report 2007-2008).

The groups with whom SCY networks are like-minded organizations, interest groups, schools, and other relevant stakeholders. For instance, Teen Court is one of SCY's important networking partners. In 2007, SCY partnered with Teen Court to train high school students to serve as peer jurors for youth convicted of minor crimes. The students learned about the juvenile justice system and the principle of restorative justice. The jurors determined the appropriate sentence for the offender, which included writing letters of apology, community service, and paying for stolen merchandise. In 2007-2008,

78 juvenile offenders and 446 teen jurors participated in the program. SCY personnel also engage in advocacy. They work with policy makers at local, state, and central levels in order to promote the rights of clients.

Origin and Background Information about Strategic Planning at SCY

In this section of the paper, the researcher will briefly discuss the three strategic plans that the organization has initiated to date. This discussion will shed light not only on the content of the plans but also on the process used to develop them. The discussion also will indicate how the different plans helped manage growth in the organization.

As has already been noted, the organization has grown rapidly. It began with a small budget and with limited paid staff and a few volunteers. According to the CEO, the organization now has a budget of about \$15 million and has nearly 500 employees and 200 volunteers. It now offers a comprehensive and integrated mix of services. Its services cover the entire City of San Diego and some parts of the county and it provides direct services to over 40,000 individuals (Annual Report 2007-2008).

As the organization grew, its ways of operating were also modified. Until the mid 1990's SCY was merely an implementing agency. Since then its role has changed and its added roles are collaborator, trainer, fiscal agent, and a leader in advocacy and networking. As part of its added role, SCY has been instrumental in forming several neighborhood community organizations that specialize and work directly with people.

According to Ken, the CEO, the changing roles and increase in activities motivated the organization to initiate strategic planning. Diane, a senior staff member, said much the same thing:

The strategic plans were initiated to revisit our mission, to respond effectively to the growing needs of our clients and our current role in the community, and to evaluate our strengths and weaknesses from an internal and external perspective so we could determine what was working, what was not working and what we needed to look like to get us where we need to be over the next five years.

The First Strategic Plan

The first plan was initiated in 1995. Prior to this, the organization did not have a strategic plan. According to the CEO, before formal strategic plans were developed, the organization simply responded to the needs of the community on an ad hoc basis and initiated several informal plans.

The first strategic plan was created to cover a five- year span, from 1996 through 2000. It was developed by a planning committee consisting of eight people: six staff members, the CEO and a board representative (The First Strategic Plan: 1996-2000). Ken, the CEO, facilitated the entire planning process. According to Ken, the process began with a half-day retreat for the committee members.

The committee discussed and revisited the purpose of the organization, its vision and mission. According to Ken, the process enabled the committee members to understand the purpose of the organization and its commitment to its clients. The committee used the familiar SWOT analysis technique to identify the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

After the SWOT analysis, the committee identified five priorities to improve its program and service delivery system: creating public awareness and recognition, establishing a continuum of service; working on minimizing substance abuse and

violence prevention; developing the organization's technology, defining ethical behavior and cultural competency; and providing community-based integrated services (The First Strategic Plan: 1996-2000). The committee identified several processes for each priority and also identified expected outcomes. Although some of the priorities had a timeline and identified people or the department(s) responsible for implementing particular activities and initiatives, the overall implementation plan was vague.

The Second Strategic Plan

The second plan was also created for a period of five years, from 2001 to 2005. Once again, the CEO facilitated the planning process. This time the planning committee had nine members: a board representative, seven SCY staff members, and Ken, the CEO. According to Ken, the staff members were senior people representing various programs and departments, and they were selected for their knowledge and experience in working with the organization. There were no outside members representing either the organization's client population or other stakeholders (e.g., donors and representative from partner organizations, and community) associated with the organization involved in the strategic planning process.

The following reasons motivated the organization to initiate the second strategic plan: 1) the time frame of the previous plan had ended; 2) there was a rapid change in the external environment; 3) the organization confronted both unstable funding and changes in donors' expectations; 4) there was a need for a change in the mode of the service delivery system in order for the organization to provide more community based services and make those programs easier for clients to access; and 5) the organization needed to respond to the rapid technology developments.

Based on the changing needs and growth of the organization, the planning committee revisited and clarified the organization's mission, and vision. The strategic plan document stated that the revision provided the organization with a clear direction, clarified the purpose of its existence, and enabled the organization to identify its core competency and distinguish itself from similar service providers in the community. Once again, the planning committee conducted a thorough SWOT analysis of the organization, its programs, finances, and its mode of service delivery.

The organization relied mainly on two methods to gather information for the SWOT analysis: interviews and focus group discussions. Based on the data and information collected, the committee identified two broad strategic directions: clarifying the organization's policies and the roles and responsibilities of the board and modifying programs and services, including improving the current service delivery system, infrastructure and use of technology (The Second Strategic Plan: 2001-2005).

The Third Strategic Plan

Like the first two plans, the third plan was also created for a five-year period, from 2006 to 2011. It had a planning committee that was comprised of 16 members including the CEO, 12 senior level staff members and department heads, two board members, and an intern who had expertise in strategic planning (The Third Strategic Plan: 2006-2011). The planning committee took about six months to develop the organization's third strategic plan.

This time, unlike the two previous endeavors, the group engaged in strategic planning with the services of a part time external facilitator. According to Ken, "The role of the consultant was mainly to introduce the topic and enable the planning committee to

think and steer the committee toward a particular direction.” The facilitator initiated the process with a half-day retreat. Ken and the board respondent said that the retreat helped them to identify some key questions and direction. The facilitator’s role ended with the retreat and then the same executive director who facilitated the first two strategic planning efforts facilitated the remainder of the process.

The third strategic plan was initiated because the time frame of the second plan had been completed, and there was a need to consolidate the existing programs. The organization was no longer simply an implementing agency, but had become a lead agency involved in collaborative relationships with other agencies. There was also a need to focus on and strengthen the organization’s growing number of field offices.

As with the other two plans, the planning committee began the process by revisiting the mission and the core values of the organization and analyzing the current and future roles of SCY in the community. These roles included SCY as a provider of direct services, community developer, convener of services network, general contactor, advocate, consultant, and leader (The Third Strategic Plan: 2006-2011).

The new roles of SCY reflected the growth of the organization. As has already been noted, SCY began its work as an implementing agency and became an intermediary agency. As an intermediary agency, it coordinates and builds the capacity of its field offices located in different communities. The planning committee reviewed its new roles and ascertained to what extent the organization was able to respond to these roles.

As with the other two plans, the committee used SWOT analysis once again to assess the external and internal environment of the organization. With respect to the external environment, the committee analyzed various trends and changes that would

impact the organization, including: business trends, trends and changes in the programs that the organization offered; and changes among its client population, communities, and partner organizations that it served. In the internal assessment, the committee analyzed the organization's strengths on which to build and the challenges that needed to be addressed sooner or later.

The planning committee used a combination of research methods including interviews, focus group discussions, extensive discussion, and questionnaires to gather data. The committee reviewed and summarized the data and determined which of the issues were critical to the organization. It outlined those issues that needed immediate attention and issues that could be addressed over an extended period of time.

Based on the data gathered, the committee identified 22 strategic directions that were further divided into two categories: existing programs and new programs. In category one, the committee analyzed the existing programs of SCY and determined which programs should be continued and which programs should be terminated. This exercise enabled the organization to select and retain programs that responded to the needs of the clients. Under the second category, the committee identified several new programs that could be developed in order to respond effectively to the changing needs of its clients and environment (The Third Strategic Plan: 2006-2011).

Stakeholders' Perspective of the Strategic Planning Process

In this section of the paper, the researcher will discuss various stakeholders' perspectives of strategic planning and the strategic plans at SCY. As in case one, some interviewees had participated in the development of all three plans, or at least worked under all three. Others were directly familiar with only one or two plans. In most cases,

during interviews respondents did not indicate which plan or planning process they were referencing. Even if they were familiar with more than the recent plan they tended to talk about strategic planning in the organization and the organization's strategic plan fairly generically. Of course, when the topic shifted to implementation of the plans, it is likely that interviewees were speaking of the implementation of the last two plans because these plans were fairly new and most of the respondents, directly or indirectly, were part of the planning process.

Steven, a senior staff said the strategic planning process was enjoyable. He said:

I enjoyed the process, and I was glad to go and it was fun to be a part of it. We talked about many things. Ken [CEO] had a variety of questions and we would spend a lot of time listening to him and discussing those questions.

But he claimed that while the planning process was good, it was not structured. For him, the planning process was more of a brainstorming session. He said: "It was kind of like free flowing ideas. Our role was to feed Ken with information, and he would create a strategic plan for the organization."

The CEO said that the planning process helped him to put different pieces together. He said:

I do not like the idea of doing things without a plan because opportunities are what you make of them, and [in strategic plan] we are putting pieces together. If you have a plan, you have a generic sense of where you are going, and then you put pieces together in a different way and the opportunities are used differently.

Frank, the board representative said that Ken initiated the plans. He called for a special planning group meeting, and put together a committee comprised of Board members, management staff, and a few staff members. The committee spent almost six months going over every program that SCY offered and it came up with

recommendations that the organization focus on in the next four to five years. For Frank, the plan was a road map that provided direction to the organization. Frank said:

[The process] helped the members to articulate and revisit the organization's vision for the future, prioritize that vision, identify key priorities to achieve that vision, and then generate ideas to mobilize resources that are required to achieve the vision.

Linda, a senior staff member, said the process gave them an opportunity to revisit the organization's mission, vision, and understand its activities and its challenges and opportunities. The strategic plans gave her direction and helped develop commitment to the organization. Molly, a member of the frontline staff said that the plan did not make much impact on her work or her department. She said that she was aware of the strategic planning process taking place in the organization and her role was very limited.

Factors that Impacted the Strategic Planning Process

The purpose of this section is to describe the respondents' perspectives on the factors that positively impacted the planning process in the organization. For the most part, respondents appeared to be describing the second and the third planning processes since these had happened most recently.

Board Retreat

The organization conducted Board retreats at the beginning of every strategic planning process. Chris, the external facilitator, emphasized the importance of Board retreats and said, "It [the retreat] helped the Board members to articulate the organization's vision for the future, prioritize that vision, then identify key priorities to achieve that vision, and then generate ideas to mobilize resources that are required to achieve the vision." Frank, the Board representative, agreed that the Board retreat was effective and it helped the Board members focus on a number of key issues such as:

succession planning for the CEO and other senior management staff that are nearing retirement, policy setting, and expanding the organization's work into other geographical areas.

Ken, also emphasizing the importance of Board retreats, said that they helped the Board members to come together and focus on the plan, and it helped the Board members to develop a broad perspective of the plans. Other committee members also said that the Board retreats were an effective way of beginning the planning process; among other things, Board retreats enabled the committees to get the support and commitment of the Board and the key stakeholders. The respondents acknowledged the importance of involving the Board and getting their support.

External Facilitator

The first two planning processes did not have an external facilitator but the latest plan was developed with the help of a facilitator, though his role was limited. Chris, the external facilitator, said that he helped the Board and the committee at the beginning and at the end of the process. Commenting on the role of the external facilitator, Ken said, "The role of the facilitator was mainly to introduce the topic and enable the Board and the planning committee to think and direct the committee toward a particular direction." His role was helping them to think through issues and provide them with direction. Ken added, "He [the external facilitator] helped me to identify some key questions to drive the process. And also in later years, I used a consultant with my Board to help them identify key questions."

With regard to use of external consultants to facilitate the strategic planning process, Ken said, "Even if you use an outside consultant, in order to effectively plan,

you've got to organize a substantial internal process; you have to do some work inside.”

He cautioned that the organization or the planning committee should not leave the facilitator with all the planning work. The planning committee and the staff must be more involved, and they must do most of the work. Although he did not see much difference between using an internal or external facilitator to do the planning process, he acknowledged the importance of the external facilitator. Ken said, “I think we've gotten slightly better results this time in using an external facilitator in some small way than doing it all by ourselves.”

Though the involvement of the external facilitator was limited, Chris, the external facilitator, said that he had two important roles during the process. First, he was a consultant for the executive director, Ken. The external facilitator said of this part of the external facilitator role: “It was more to sit down with him and allow him to think out loud and help him to talk about the issues then help him frame the process that he wanted to pursue.” His second role was to help the Board members think how they wanted to approach the strategic planning process and reach a consensus as to what were the key priorities and how they wanted to implement those key priorities.

Molly, the frontline staff respondent, did not have any comment with regard to whether the facilitator must be from inside or from outside the organization. However, Linda and Steven, two senior staff members who were on the planning committee, expressed the need for an external facilitator to provide a balanced perspective of the planning process. Steven also recommended an external facilitator. He said the staff and the planning committee members might be more willing, comfortable and confident to talk to a neutral person—an outsider—rather than an insider. He suggested that having an

insider might restrict the free flow of information. The study reveals that all respondents expressed the importance of having a consultant or facilitator to guide the planning process.

Planning Committee

All three strategic planning processes had a planning committee that was comprised of board representatives, the CEO, and some senior staff members. According to Steven, the CEO selected the committee members. Steven said, "He [the CEO] decided who should be on the committee and no criteria were used in selecting members." Steven suggested the only criterion used in the selection was that the committee members must be representatives of important programs and departments. Ken agreed that the committee members were representatives of different departments and programs and they were selected for their knowledge on the topic and experience in the field.

With regard to the composition of the committee, Ken said: "I had people that were very senior, and some folks that were very junior. I had folks there that were fairly professional and folks that were highly professional." Frank agreed that it was a diverse committee. While emphasizing the importance of a diverse committee of people with knowledge and experience, Frank said:

We [planning committee] could get a better feel of the problem when you have people from different departments and hear them talking about their programs. It was interesting for the board to hear the trends and our staff knows them and knows their work and it was very helpful to the Board.

All respondents recognized the importance of the planning committee and said that it was a diverse committee of people with knowledge and experience. According to Frank, a diverse committee made the planning process easier, concrete, and realistic.

Table 5.1 provides examples of what different interviewees said about the significance of planning committee.

Table 5.1: Planning Committee

Steven	The committee was comprised of senior staff members and representatives of different programs and departments.
Ken	[The committee was] represented by people from major service components, knowledge and experience and whom they reported back to, the unit they came from, and with certain significant client population or referral populations.
Linda	They [staff representatives and departmental heads] are the first people who see our clients and sometimes they hear and see things that don't necessarily come to the top of the organization. They see and hear things because they work with the people.
Chris	They bring in all the necessary constituencies into the room and are able to represent all the interests of the organization, stakeholders, and its work.
Molly	The members are representatives from different departments. They represented our work and the department.
Frank	The committee members were people with knowledge and experience and they had better feel of the organization, its work, and its problems.

With regard to the relevance of the strategic planning committee, Ken said in large organizations such as SCY, when a plan is done at the Board level and given to the staff, it never works.

According to Ken:

[The reason is] the organization serves diverse groups and diverse populations. I need people from the field to plan, know the general direction, and respond to the needs of the people they serve. So, to do that I need a lot of ownership with the plan, I need what's in the plan to be spread out there. It is not the board but the staff members that can take the plan to people.

Linda, a senior staff member and head of a department also acknowledged the importance of planning committee. She said that the committee members at SCY represented their department and programs and they were therefore a link between the committee and the staff members and clients. The representatives know the programs

because they see them and they are intimately involved with them. According to Ken, the purpose of selecting committee members from major programs and departments was that they would take the plan to their primary group, discuss it and collect their feedback and report the findings to the planning committee.

Participation of Stakeholders who were not on the Committee

Most respondents said that the staff and other stakeholders who were not on the committee had opportunities to participate in the planning process. The planning committee members had meetings with them and some selected groups of consumers. However, the staff respondents maintained that the staff members and others who were not on the committee did not have enough opportunities to participate.

Frank, the board representative, appreciated the role of the committee members in taking the plan back to the people and involving them in the process. He said that the committee members met with the staff from their departments and were instructed to “Tell us what you are seeing within the department because we’re in this planning thing and we want to report what you saw.” He observed that the planning process was a bottom up approach and inclusive of everybody’s opinion. It is interesting, however, that the staff respondents, particularly Steven and Molly, did not see the process as a bottom up approach.

In addition, according to Ken, some of the staff members were involved in collecting data through surveys and focus group meetings. He said: “The staff members were often asked to help us gather data, so, for example, we asked some of our childcare workers to run focus groups of little kids and parents.” Steven appreciated this process and said: “It was good, and they [staff] were involved in gathering data and could express

their ideas and participate to some extent in the planning process from outside.” Linda recognized the importance of involving the staff and other stakeholder and said:

It makes them realize that they are part of a bigger mission and part of a bigger organization, and that their input was important. I think they felt a matter of pride and ownership in that yes, somebody is asking my opinion.

Steven also noted that the organization had a great multi-cultural clientele and multi-cultural staff, but they were not represented on the planning committee. They had little or no opportunity to express their views and concerns. He said: “We [the planning committee] had no consumers on the planning committee, no one that was a client on the planning committee. We only had staff.” He said when people are not represented they cannot share their opinions and concerns. In such situations, Steven observed, “It makes us, especially the planning committee, work from lots of assumptions, and often these assumptions are not necessarily accurate.” He was deeply concerned and said that in an important process such as this, one might mean well and one might be concerned about those segments of population, but,

if there is no one to represent a segment of the population, no way to get their opinion then we are taking our experience as a group, as an outsider, and not as a Latino man and his needs and concerns.

Molly, a frontline staff member, agreed with Steven and said that she did not feel that the staff members and other stakeholders had much opportunity to participate in the planning process. She did not think that there were enough opportunities for them to share their ideas except during staff meetings. She felt that the staff meetings were short and had many agenda items, and there was little time to talk about the planning process. Molly said:

During staff meetings we were given time to share our opinion, about the trends that we saw, how we saw our units going and where we wanted to be in five

years. The time was too short and all could not share or participate in the discussion. I think it was more of sharing information. The department heads used staff meetings to inform the status of the plan and not much to get our ideas. Many of us felt planning was not our responsibility but of the top management. We did not care.

The staff respondents acknowledged that staff members, clients, and other key stakeholders—donors and contractors—who were not on the committee had opportunities to participate in the planning process but their participation was very minimal. Table 5.2 provides representative examples of comments about stakeholder participation.

Table 5.2: Participation of Stakeholders not on the Planning Committee.

Steven	There were surveys and group discussions and the staff could express their ideas and participate in the process.
Ken	They [staff members who were not on the committee] were often asked to help us [the planning committee] gather data.
Linda	It makes them realize that they are part of a bigger mission and part of a bigger organization, and that their input was important.
Molly	I [a frontline staff member] was not aware of any forum that existed to share our ideas except staff meetings.
Frank	It was interesting to hear the trends and our staff who knows and works with these people every day, and as a board member and a planning committee member it was very helpful.

Factors That Facilitated and Inhibited the Implementation Process

The overarching purpose of this section is to discuss the factors that facilitated and inhibited the implementation of strategic plans at SCY. As noted earlier, the factors that are analyzed in these two sections are mainly about the last two plans.

Factors That Facilitated the Implementation of Strategic Plans

The factors that were identified by the participants as facilitating implementation of strategic plans at SCY were: leadership, staff retention, and reputation of the organization.

Leadership. All respondents acknowledged the role of leadership in the creation and implementation of strategic plans in their organization, and they recognized the leadership role of Ken, the CEO. The Board respondent appreciated the CEO's role and noted that he built up the organization and created the strategic plans for the organization. All three staff respondents recognized Ken's leadership style and they said he gave them freedom and opportunities for creativity and creative thinking in the organization. Steven said that he had freedom to work and this was one of the reasons that lead to the creation of strategic plans for SCY. He said: "I think there is a lot of creative energy in the agency." Steven added, "I think that the beauty of how Ken works is that he allows freedom.... And there is a lot of autonomy in SCY. I have a lot of autonomy in the direction of my work." Steven also noted: "We have so much freedom and autonomy at SCY. That is why we were able to develop three strategic plans." Other staff respondents also acknowledged Ken's role in creating the strategic plans for the organization.

According to Linda, a senior staff respondent, another important aspect of Ken's leadership was that he is highly respected for his ability to lead the organization and his knowledge and experience in strategic planning. She also acknowledged that he guided the organization and was instrumental in creating the strategic plans for SCY.

Chris and Frank mentioned some of the specific qualities of Ken's leadership, especially with regard to implementation of strategic plans. The qualities were his commitment and accountability. Chris emphasized the importance of accountability when he said: "One must ask, "What is my level of accountability for that piece of the plan? Am I as a leader accountable; it [implementation] might not happen unless the top management feels committed and accountable?"

However, according to Ken, the CEO, another reason for the effective creation and implementation of the plans is staff championing of the cause. He said, “Leadership or a champion drives the pieces and it gets implemented a little better.” He claimed that the organization has many champions to lead and take the first step. He also emphasized that it is not enough to have money and other resources to keep the programs alive. Though money is an important component, he emphasized that leadership plays a major role in keeping the program alive.

Molly, a frontline staff member, acknowledged that she had a lot of freedom to work but she did not have much to say about the leadership role of Ken or the leadership team at SCY. She commented: “He [Ken] mainly worked with the top level management team. I did not know that there was a strategic planning committee.”

The respondents, particularly the staff, recognized Ken’s commitment and role in developing the strategic plans for SCY but they did not see in him the same commitment and enthusiasm with regard to implementing the plans. Steven and Linda, for example, said that there were no follow-up meetings and evaluation of any sort.

Table 5.3 summarizes some of what respondents said about the role of leadership especially the role of Ken, in facilitating the implementation of strategic plans.

Table 5.3: Interviewees’ Comments about the Role of Leadership

Steven	There is a lot of creative energy in the agency [I think] that is a key factor of why if we have moved in the direction of the strategic plan, that there is a lot of autonomy to be creative and innovative within this agency and through that synergy of the staff, we have been able to successfully move ahead and that is because of Ken’s leadership.
Ken	Leadership or a champion drive the pieces and it get implemented a little better. Leadership plays an important role in keeping the program alive... It is one thing to go seek money for a new program; it is another thing to make a program survive.

Linda	<p>When he [Ken] speaks to the staff and refers to the strategic plan, he is able to connect and reaches out to people. He is able to communicate to them and give them direction and make them feel ownership.</p> <p>It [strategic plan] really does start with him, and he sets the tone for the agency and he's very committed to that and it trickles down to the staff, they are very committed to him and the agency.</p>
Chris	<p>A plan might not get implemented unless we as a team are accountable; it might not happen unless the senior management team feels accountable.</p>
Frank	<p>Because of Ken that the organization is quite well known in San Diego. He is the spokesperson and a link between the organization and the community.</p> <p>We have a CEO that has leadership requirements within organization and then community leadership requirements.</p>

Retention of staff. The respondents expressed that retention of staff is high at SCY. According to Chris, the reasons are: job motivation, friendly office atmosphere, opportunity for growth, and opportunity to use one's talents and be creative. With regard to the friendly environment, Linda said: "The office environment is very caring and friendly." Chris also commented on the friendly environment and said: "When folks come to work at SCY, it's not like just coming to work at any organization; it really does have an atmosphere that we are doing great things and we care about what we do." He said that it is easier to implement a program when everybody's core values are the same because it keeps them committed.

Another reason for staff retention is opportunity for growth and promotion within the organization. Linda said that she started as a program officer 20 years ago and now she is the Director of the extended day care program. She now oversees forty-four before and after school programs. Because SCY is a large organization, the staff members have much opportunity for internal promotion and SCY encourages internal promotion.

Staff retention is also facilitated by competitive salaries and job security. Linda said that the third strategic plan revised staff salaries and other benefits in line with other organizations in San Diego.

Reputation of the organization. All respondents noted that SCY is locally known and it has a good track record in the community and among its donors. While commenting on the organization's reputation, Frank said: "We [the Board] don't hear or get significant complaints from our funding sources." He said that not receiving complaint is important for organizations, especially with regard to generating funds. Steven observed that SCY is well known in the community and among its donors, and therefore, the organization gets a strong support from local communities and donors. Ken said that the reputation of the organization helps to mobilize volunteers, funds, and organizing programs:

Factors That Inhibited the Implementation Process

Participants identified the following factors as those that inhibited the implementation of strategic plans: limited money and an unstable source of revenues; lack of integration of the plan; ineffective communication; lengthy final document; and large size of the organization.

Limited or unstable funds. Though SCY is financially somewhat stable, the respondents said that money is a perennial concern to the organization. Frank said: "The money aspect is sort of scary and it goes on year to year." According to Frank, financial problems result from the fact that the organization gets a large sum of money from the State and government that often changes its priorities and policies. He said that he was not certain the flow of money would continue. He said that the uncertainty of funding

could hamper implementation of plans. Although money is not a major concern to the organization, Frank said that over-dependency on government, and the unstable funding situation that this dependence creates, affect the implementation of the plans and continuity of programs.

Linda proffered that, because of limited and uncertain funding, the organization was slow in implementing some of the recommendations mentioned in the second plan. In particular, provisions about providing better compensation and revising salaries of the staff were delayed. Frank also mentioned this delay, and he emphasized the importance of providing better salaries. He said that if SCY does not provide a living wage to its staff, it might be hard to retain its staff and talented and experienced staff might quit the organization for better pay.

Lack of integration of the plan. Steven observed that staff members are busy with their daily work assignments, and they do not have much time to take on additional work. As a consequence, Chris said that there is a possibility that the staff will forget the plan. To keep the plan alive, Chris suggested, “The plan must be woven into their day-to-day job; if not, it won’t get done.” According to him, being “woven into...day-to-day job[s]” means that the plan must become a basic part of the organization’s work. According to him, this had not happened at SCY.

In fact, all three staff respondents acknowledged that there is a huge gap between the plan and their daily work. According to them, the reason plans are not integrated with their daily work is because they are not discussed in forums such as staff meetings and staff retreats and training events. Of the three staff respondents, only one had seen a copy of the final plan, which indicates that department heads or the staff members do not refer

back to the plan. Steven said [while referring to the plans], “What I do know is that I have not looked at the plan... and I don’t think we get reminded to look at it. I don’t think it is structured in a way to look at it.” According to Steven, the reason for the disconnect or gap, is that there is no motivation or guidance from the CEO to do so. Other staff respondents also acknowledged this disconnect, though different staff members had different explanations for the gap. For Linda, the reason for the disconnect is workload, and for Molly, it is a lack of direction from the CEO and his leadership team.

Ineffective communication. Communication plays an important role during the implementation of strategic plans. Ken proffered that the implementation of strategic plans requires cross-unit communication. According to him, effective communication enables the organization to get programs implemented and helps the staff to know the status of the program and their role with regard to implementation.

The respondents acknowledged that communication about the strategic plan at SCY was quite ineffective. Molly, for instance, said: “I don’t think half the people in the organization knew what the strategic plan was or that it even existed, let alone what was in it.” Because SCY is a large organization, she felt that it is hard to get the plan disseminated to everybody unless the organization has a good communication system. She said the staff would participate better if the organization used the Internet and other facilities to communicate with the staff. She recommended, “You [the organization] could use staff meetings, put out a real quick survey among staff and you would probably get a lot of good information and feedback that way.”

The final written document. With regard to the final strategic plan document, Steven said: “The document was basically too narrative and wordy. It did not capture our

ideas, and we were not enthusiastic about it.” Because it was too narrative and wordy Steven said that it was hard for the frontline staff to read and understand its recommendations. Molly, a member of the frontline staff, also acknowledged this problem and said that the plan was too big and the writing was unnecessarily technical. She said, “We are so busy with our work and 72 pages was too much to read.” Steven said that because it was too large, it did not appeal to him or the other staff, and he observed, “It always just feels like we are wasting our time.”

Steven’s observation is supported by the fact that none of the staff respondents had even seen the final document or had a copy in their department. The study revealed that, other than the executive director, no one had seen or possessed a copy of the document. Steven acknowledged this situation and said: “I think that is why [i.e., because it is too narrative and wordy] it has never been fully embraced by the staff nor implemented. It is Ken’s plan and we did not feel that it was our plan or wanted it.”

Ken, the CEO, acknowledged that the last two strategic plan documents were lengthy and broad but he said he had two reasons to make them so. The first reason was to accommodate new programs depending on the changing needs of clients, community, and environment. He said if the plans were too narrowly defined, it would be hard to accommodate new programs. In such situations, Ken claimed that the clients would be the losers and the organization would be missing an opportunity to serve its clients.

The second reason Ken used to justify the rather broad provisions in the plans was that he expected the entire organization to take responsibility in implementing the plan as opposed to a few staff members or a few departments as is often typical with

implementation of strategic plans in organizations. Table 5.4 provides examples of comments of respondents about the final document.

Table 5.4: Final Document.

Steven	The document was basically too narrative and wordy and it did not capture our ideas, and we were not enthusiastic about it.
Ken	The plan was kept broad in order to accommodate the changing needs of the organization.
Linda	We [the committee] need to be able to get it into the hands of staff something that is digestible and easy for them to implement. It's almost like you might need two plans.
Molly	We are busy with our work and 72 pages [referring to the third plan's document] was too much read.

Large size of the organization. SCY is a large organization and it has diverse programs. With regard to its diversity of programs, Linda said:

We have programs that are so different from each other that it is hard to have one plan that everybody feels ownership of. It is almost like the plan is over on one side, but I am doing my job over here. The plan has nothing much to do with my work or department and sometimes it is not relevant to our work.

Because of the large size of the organization, Linda said that one department did not know what the other department was doing. One consequence of all of this was that the organization was unable to coordinate different programs and departments.

In such a large organization, it is difficult to have one plan that resonates for the entire organization, according to Linda. Steven suggested that, based on the over all plan of the organization, every department must do its own planning and the leadership team must coordinate and work together to ensure that they are moving in the right direction. There was little evidence that this sort of coordination was occurring.

Implementation committee. SCY does not have an implementation committee. In principle, this committee is important because, as Steven said, when staff members are left to themselves to find ways to implement the plan “it never happens.” Implementation is not likely to happen because the staff members are busy and no one wants to do any additional work.

Linda identified another source of implementation difficulties and another reason to recommend an implementation committee. The strategic plan does not have a structure, a timeline, or a central coordination committee. She said:

I think we just need to make it more structured so that there are more timelines for programs and there is connection. I think until that, until we do better than that, I think the plan could end up on a shelf and program staff could just go about their jobs, which they do very well. They're busy doing their job.

Linda observed that the planning committee at SCY was very committed but that there was not an equally committed committee set up to direct and oversee the planning committee's work. She said: “We should have charged each committee member with carrying on the strategic plan in their department because they were very much vested in the plan. But then we just sent them away with not much follow-up.”

Linda also observed that there was no follow-up after the planning was completed and responsibility was not given to any person, committee, or groups to actually implement the plan. All respondents acknowledged that the organization did not have a follow-up and Ken also acknowledged this and said: “That is the area we could have improved a bit.”

Prioritizing the plan. The respondents noted that the strategic plans were too broad and had too many recommendations. Steven said: “The last two plans were too

ambitious.” He added, “We did not know where to begin, when to begin, and what to implement.” He claimed the staff members were confused with the plan.

Chris recognized that organizations cannot implement all recommendations and, therefore, depending on needs, they must prioritize. Instead of blaming others, SCY should take up those recommendations that are immediate and relevant to its clients, he said. He said [the staff should ask]: “What are the few things that are most important for us to do?”

Recommendations for Future

In this section of the paper, the researcher will analyze the recommendations respondents provided about improving the strategic planning process and implementation of plans in the future. The themes that emerged include the value of: improving the final written document, improving the planning process, having a clear timeline, conducting a periodic evaluation of the plans, and setting up a follow-up committee.

The Final Written Document

Most respondents said the final document was too wordy and it did not appeal to them and, therefore, Steven suggested, “Cut the wording out. Put it in a grid at least or something with bullet points! Maybe do it in a different structure based on the audience that you are trying to reach.”

Linda recommended a short summary or a handbook for the frontline staff. She said: “It is not enough to have a wonderful document, but we need to be able to get it into the hands of staff, into something that is digestible and easy for them to implement.” All three staff respondents commented that the document was too difficult and technical to understand and implement, especially for the frontline staff.

Improving the Planning Process

Frank suggested that during the planning process the staff, particularly the managers, must be given more opportunities to share information. In order to elicit their participation, he suggested having small group meetings with them. He also suggested surveys (anonymous surveys) and one-on-one meetings with them, especially with some of the senior staff members. He argued that meeting with them is important because, he said, “They [managers] have a lot of experience and information and in meetings such as these they can provide their information that can be used for the planning.”

Frank also suggested that there should be more meetings with the staff, and the planning committee must give importance to a bottom-up process. With regard to the bottom-up approach, he said: “Everyone gets to participate, regardless of what you’re doing. If you’re trying to convince someone to merge or somebody to affiliate, you can’t just mandate it down, you have to make sure everybody gets behind it.”

Timeline

All respondents emphasized the importance of adopting a timeline, and they acknowledged that the last two strategic plans did not have a timeline.

Steven said:

I really wanted to go in here and take out statements, action statements, out of the narrative and put them into a form to establish a timeline and who would be accountable, but I never did because I got busy with my work and I wasn’t asked to do it.

Linda said a timeline “will make people committed and responsible.” Linda commented about the works of the planning committee and said that the plan did not produce desired results because it had no timeline, no follow-up committee, and no one was given responsibility to implement it.

Periodic Evaluation

All respondents emphasized the importance of evaluation, and they recommended an annual evaluation of the plan. While emphasizing the importance of evaluation, Linda said: “Evaluation holds people accountable, and it must be done every year.” Steven added, “Evaluation must become part of the plan, and must be done periodically.” Molly also recommended an ongoing evaluation and said:

Evaluation keeps you on track, keeps you focused. I think we don't get to goals sometimes because we don't ever look at it again. If you have a goal you need to evaluate it, how you're getting there and what you need to do to get there.

Molly added that environmental and clients' needs are changing rapidly and, therefore, evaluation will help the organization adapt to the changing needs and achieve its goals and direct the organization where it wants to go.

Chris said: “It [evaluation] is a reality check” and suggested that evaluations must be done annually. He said an evaluation will help you ask questions, such as: “We wanted to go here and did we and how did we go there and is our program still relevant to our clients?” He added that policies are changing and the cash flow out of Sacramento is getting smaller and therefore, if an organization does not stand back and evaluate its plan in the context of changing environment, it is in trouble. He said: “You can make a time plan that you think is reasonable and then you periodically check in and ask SCY: ‘Is it still real and relevant to the people we serve?’”

Implementation Committee

As has already been noted, SCY does not have an implementation committee. All respondents except the CEO recommended forming an implementation committee. Linda suggested the planning committee members, or a few of them, must form a committee to

do follow-up because they know the process, the plan and the recommendations.

However, Steven suggested appointing a different group to do follow-up that could consist of a few planning committee members, Board representatives and a few staff members.

Linda said that a committee is important to do follow-up, and it also can share information with and provide direction to the staff. She also suggested that a follow-up committee could oversee the evaluation of the plan. Chris suggested a management team comprising of Board representatives implement the plan.

Organizational Changes Brought About by Strategic Planning

All respondents acknowledged that SCY has gone through major changes with the introduction of strategic plans. Steven said: “The organization is already moving with the trends and has a clear purpose. It [change] is happening, but may not be happening as systematically as my sense of what a strategic plan should do.” Ken added:

The organization has grown and the plans have created new programs, opportunities, and directions that we wanted. It has kept staff excited about what they are doing, and it is one of the ways that we maintain our responsiveness to the people we serve.

Linda and Frank said that the strategic plans have left them with clear guidelines to prioritize their programs. According to Linda, the plans have given her a clear focus and direction. She said: “I feel that from participating in the plan and being aware of the plan that it keeps me, even though it is broad, it keeps me focused.” For example, Linda said, SCY does not accept just any programs simply because funds are available.

Chris agreed with Linda on this point, and said the plans have helped them to choose programs and identify new programs that fall within their mission. With regard to starting new programs, the organization is open to it but he said: “We don’t amend our

mission [to accommodate new programs]. If something new comes up, we accept it only if it falls in line with our mission.” The organization’s strategic plans have helped reinforce this mission driven orientation.

Strategic planning has also brought the organization closer to its clients and community. As a result, Ken said SCY is more known in the local community and, as a result, it is able to market its programs/activities among its clients and donors. With regard to marketing its program, Linda said: “I think we have done a much better job of marketing our programs to our childcare parents. I think they are much more aware of the wraparound services that the agency offers.”

According to Chris, another change the plans have brought about is that Ken, the CEO, and a few senior staff members will be retiring soon and the search committee is using the strategic plans as a basis for selecting replacements.

Another change is that, consistent with the recommendations of the third strategic plan, SCY has formed several committees and the Board members are representing these committees. The respondents said that it [involvement of the Board members] is a great change and this has increased Board participation. While commenting on this adopted change Chris said: “It [the involvement of the Board members] will benefit the organization because unless the Board members have more time and understand the bigger picture of the organization, they cannot effectively guide the organization.” According to respondents, the strategic plans have helped them understand their roles and increased their participation.

Summary

SCY has developed and implemented three consecutive strategic plans. The respondents claimed that strategic plans have given them focus and new strategies to respond effectively to the changing environment and the needs of the clients. However, most members of the organization felt that the contents of the plan were not integrated into their daily work and there is not much motivation or guidance either from the CEO or the management team to stay focused on the plan. However, when respondents were asked if they would recommend developing a new plan once the current plan was completed, they said they would recommend future development because plans give them direction.

According to respondents, the factors that facilitated the implementation of strategic plans were: leadership, staff retention, and reputation of the organization; and the factors that inhibited the implementation were: uncertain funding, large size of the final document, ineffective communication, lack of integration of plan with the daily work, large size of the organization, and lack of an implementation committee.

The study revealed that the staff members respect the CEO for his many years of service at SCY and his knowledge and experience with strategic plans. He used his experience in developing the plans but did not seem to emphasize implementation of the plans. Chris and Frank claimed that the CEO was an able planner and commented on his fund raising skills. Staff respondents were concerned about his implementing strategies and they also claimed that he was less transparent with his ideas and the communication system within the organization.

For a large organization such as SCY, it is important that the staff, the Board, and other key stakeholders work together with a common purpose and vision. One of the drawbacks of strategic plans at SCY is that the plans remained at the top or the management level and did not reach to the frontline staff. There was a huge communication gap between the top-level management and the frontline staff. Therefore, those at lower levels of the organization did not show as much enthusiasm or involvement as the management staff did. For a plan to be effective and achieve its purpose, the entire organization including the board, the CEO, the management team, frontline staff, and other key stakeholders must work together in the planning process and also in the implementation of the plans.

CHAPTER VI

A CROSS CASE ANALYSIS

MRD and SCY were the two organizations selected for the research study. For the study, 12 respondents—6 from each organization—were selected. The interview participants from each organization included: the CEO, one Board member, the organization's external consultants, two senior or management staff members who were on the planning committee, and one frontline staff member. All of the informants were on the planning committee except for the frontline staff members. The staff members, however, were involved in the planning and implementation process.

MRD is a small organization with 15 staff members, few programs, and with an annual budget over \$1 million; whereas SCY, by contrast, is a larger organization with almost 500 staff members, many programs, and an annual budget of about \$15 million. Although the client population and programs of these two organizations are different, their missions—to provide support and services to those in need—are quite similar.

Because the size, programs, and client population of these organizations are different, it is somewhat difficult to compare and contrast the major research findings about strategic planning and the implementation process in each organization. At a superficial level, of course, the strategic planning process is generally the same in most organizations. The real stories about strategic planning—and especially the stories about implementation—are detailed in the case studies presented earlier. The purpose of this section is to compare and contrast the details found in studying two organizations that differ in size, programs, and client populations.

The following comparison is organized around three general topics. First, the common factors (similarities) that either facilitated or inhibited the implementation

process in both of the organizations will be discussed. Then, the focus shifts to major differences between the planning and/or implementation process in each organization and the implications of these differences. Finally, the cross-case analysis compares and contrasts the recommendations that the respondents in each organization offered for improving the planning and implementation process in future.

Similarities Between the Two Cases

Factors that Facilitated the Planning and Implementation Process

Four factors emerged in both studies as contributors to successful implementation of a strategic plan: (a) the importance of leadership, (b) the significance of planning committee, (c) the contribution of an external facilitator, and (d) the importance of staff retention.

Leadership. The respondents at both organizations acknowledged leadership as an important factor that facilitated both the strategic planning process in the organization and the implementation of the plans that had been developed. In both cases, interviewees said that their CEOs provided the leadership in both the planning and implementation process and described their CEOs as committed, hard working, accountable, knowledgeable, and visionary.

Four respondents at MRD highlighted the fact that their CEO connects with people, sets a good example and is a good communicator, while respondents at SCY talked about their CEO giving them freedom, encouraging creativity, and rewarding creative initiatives. This freedom and creativity were cited by some as one of the main reasons for the growth of the organizations and the initiation of strategic plans at these

organizations. Interviewees in both organizations also stressed the CEO's role in holding people accountable for implementing the plan.

Although everyone interviewed indicated that their CEOs provided leadership in strategic planning and implementation—and in the organization generally—and all the respondents were quite positive about the leadership that they provided, the picture painted by those interviewed was not entirely rosy. A senior respondent at SCY, for instance, acknowledged that the CEO has a vision; but this respondent also indicated that the vision was not effectively communicated and did not reach down to the frontline staff. This insight was corroborated by other evidence: one of the frontline staff members could not articulate the overall vision of the organization when asked, although she could articulate the vision of her department. She further said that SCY spends a lot of time and resources in developing its strategic plans, but it is not as enthusiastic and successful in implementing it. The reasons, according to the interviewee, were that staff members receive little guidance from the CEO, and implementation of plans are not given much importance as matters concerning implementation are briefed in staff meetings.

It is possible that at least some of this criticism was a result of the size of the organization. It certainly is the case that in the much smaller organization, negative comments were virtually nonexistent. Despite the criticism in one organization, however, the consensus was that leadership was a key ingredient to successfully implement a strategic plan, and that for the most part the leaders of the two organizations were doing a good job of providing such leadership.

Planning committee. A second factor that was identified in both cases as an important ingredient for facilitating the development of a strategic plan was the use of a

well-structured planning committee. Although the terminology used to characterize what constituted a well-structured committee differed somewhat—at MRD respondents used the phrase, “balanced committee,” whereas, at SCY, respondents tended to talk of a “diverse committee”—the point made was essentially the same: planning committees need to be representative of the organization.

With regard to the selection of committee members, both organizations used similar criteria. Michael at MRD said: “I think they were selected for their knowledge of the agency, knowledge of the issues, and knowledge of the community,” and Ken, the CEO at SCY, indicated that the committee members were selected from different departments and programs because of their knowledge and experience. There was consensus that a diverse and balanced committee was essential for developing a plan that was both responsive to the needs of the organization and its clients and widely accepted by those who must be relied on to implement the plan.

Once again, there was not total consistency across the two organizations; nor was the picture that was painted uniformly complimentary. One potentially important difference is that the third strategic planning committee at MRD had three external participants on it, but the planning committee at SCY did not have any external participants. According to Ken, the CEO of SCY, the reason for not having an external representative was that he wanted to keep the committee small and focused. Presumably, the challenge of keeping the committee small while still maintaining representation was more important in a large organization like SCY rather than in a much smaller organization like MRD.

Steven at SCY also argued that it was a weakness not to have clients (who also were not included on the MRD planning team) nor frontline staff representatives (who were included in the MRD planning group) on the committee. He said that the committee, therefore, had to work with a lot of assumptions. He also claimed that in such a situation, if concerned people are not adequately represented, they do not feel ownership of the plan. If they do not feel the ownership, Steven maintained, the plan remains “not the organization’s plan, but his [Ken’s] plan and ‘he’ wanted it.” In fact, all three staff respondents at SCY expressed concerns that the staff members did not feel ownership of the plan. Whether greater representation by staff on the planning committee would have netted a greater sense of ownership could not be determined in this study, however.

External facilitator. Both organizations hired external consultants to facilitate the planning process and interviewees in both organization believed that the facilitator was a positive factor in the planning process. The facilitator role was different in each of the organizations, however.

The role of the facilitator was limited at SCY. Ken, the CEO said: “His role was mainly to introduce the topic and enable the Board and the planning committee to think and direct the committee toward a particular direction.” Ken favored an internal facilitator because he said that the internal facilitator knows the organization, its programs, and its client population. Ken functioned as the internal facilitator of all three strategic planning processes at SCY.

Although Ken preferred an internal facilitator, he emphasized the advantage of hiring an external facilitator. However, he cautioned organizations to think they can get an outside facilitator to do the planning for them. He said: “I don't think that's correct.”

He said even if the organization hires an outside consultant to facilitate the planning process, the staff members must do their part. He suggested that organizations should not leave the whole planning to the facilitator. Ken said: “It is not the facilitator’s plan,” and therefore, the staff must be involved.

MRD also hired an external facilitator and, in this case, the facilitator was involved throughout the entire planning process. According to Carmen, the CEO, his role was to help the committee to reflect critically and keep them focused on the objectives of the plan. The CEO said: “It is very helpful to have someone from outside with more expertise to begin the process...and to serve in that role.”

The other respondents at MRD said that their facilitator was neutral. He met with all the staff members individually during the planning process and according to Michael and Mark, the senior staff members were more willing, comfortable, and confident to talk to a neutral person who is an outsider than talk to an insider.

With the exception of the CEO, who preferred an internal facilitator (which, of course, is the role Ken played), all staff members of the SCY planning committee indicated that they would have preferred an external facilitator who would have played a greater role throughout the process. Because the CEO was the primary facilitator of all three planning processes, the respondents said that the planning process seemed to be more of a top-down process. One interviewee, for instance said: “It was his [the CEO’s] plan and our role was to provide him with information.”

To summarize, of all respondents at SCY and MRD, nine emphasized the importance of hiring an external facilitator. One of the CEOs wanted to limit the role of the external facilitator. In addition, the frontline staff respondents in both organizations

recognized the importance of hiring a facilitator but did not specify an internal or external facilitator. However, for free sharing of information and to maintain confidentiality, the frontline staff respondents also preferred an outside facilitator.

Staff retention. The last factor that was identified in both cases as facilitating the successful development and implementation of a strategic plan was staff retention. In both cases, respondents said that high staff turnover affects the implementation and continuity of the plan and staff's enthusiasm for the plan.

The CEO at MRD observed that staff retention is generally low in small organizations and the reasons for this are low pay, inadequate compensation, and uncertainties of the job. However at MRD, the respondents said that staff retention is fairly high for the following reasons: organization's mission, job satisfaction, friendly office atmosphere, and freedom and autonomy in their work. The staff respondents, for instance, claimed that a friendly office atmosphere provides work satisfaction, even though the salary and other benefits are low at MRD.

Staff retention at SCY is also high and respondents at SCY provided similar reasons as were stated in the MRD case. Besides the above reasons, the respondents shared a few additional reasons for staff retention, such as: reputation of the organization, better pay, and opportunity for growth and internal promotion.

To summarize, the respondents in both organizations claimed that their organization was successful in retaining their staff members, and they maintained that their retention was one of the reasons for the successful development and, especially, the implementation of strategic plans in their organization.

Factors that Inhibited the Implementation of Strategic Plans

Two factors emerged in both case studies as inhibiting the implementation of strategic plans in their organization: workload and limited or unstable sources of revenue.

Workload. Workload is a major concern to both organizations. Workload did not seem to affect the planning process at either organization because the duration of the planning process was relatively short: moreover, the planning process is typically tightly structured, which was true in both organizations.

The respondents at SCY said that workload had a negative impact in the implementation of the plans, however. The staff respondents claimed that they were busy with their daily work, and did not have much time for any additional work. Linda and Molly, two staff respondents at SCY, affirmed this claim and said that their daily work took so much of their time that they did not have time for anything else.

The staff respondents and the CEO at MRD also acknowledged that the workload was high at MRD, and it was a major concern that they were unable to devote sufficient time to the planning process. The CEO and the senior staff respondents said that due to demanding day-to-day tasks, it was rather challenging—though not entirely impossible at MRD—to keep track of the strategic plan and its recommendations.

In spite of workload, MRD was able to implement almost all recommendations because the plans were integrated with their daily work and the staff members were very much aware of the plans and also their responsibilities for implementing them. Views of implementation success were somewhat mixed at SCY with the CEO expressing the view that implementation had been successful. However, some others, particularly the staff

interviewees indicated that they were somewhat disengaged from the implementation process.

Limited and unstable funds. Money is a major concern to both organizations. The respondents at both organizations said that limited and unstable funds affected the implementation of plans. Money is a major concern because these organizations totally depend on donors and government agencies for funding, and respondents claimed that government funding is especially unstable because of the government's changing priorities and policies.

Uncertainty of funds also delays the implementation of plans. The respondents at MRD, for instance, claimed that they could not continue a number of projects because the organization had no money to support those projects. The respondents at SCY claimed that during the implementation of the organization's second strategic plan, the organization could not provide a pay increase and other staff benefits for two years. This lack of pay increase, of course, has implications for staff retention, and plan implementation.

Chris at SCY said that it is not enough to have good plans; if there is no money and if plans are not implemented, it can discourage the staff. In fact, the respondents at both organizations claimed that uncertainty of funding not only affects the implementation of plans but also continuation of programs; and they said when programs are discontinued for lack of funds, it affects their morale and enthusiasm.

Factors that were Employed Differently at MRD and SCY

In this section of the paper, the researcher will discuss factors common to both organizations but that had different effects with regard to its implementation. The factors were: effective communication, the use of specific timelines, and quality of the final written document.

Communication

The CEO at SCY claimed that the implementation of strategic plans required cross-unit communication. Communication enabled the organization to more effectively implement programs because it helped the staff to know the status of the plan and clarified roles in getting it done. If communication is not effective, it could inhibit the sharing of information and consequently slow down the efficiency of providing services to clients.

Interestingly, although the SCY CEO talked about the importance of communication, the staff respondents at SCY claimed that communication throughout the organization was ineffective. Commenting on the effectiveness of communication at SCY, a staff respondent said: "I don't think half the people in the organization knew what the strategic plan was or that it even existed, let alone what was in it." Whether these communication difficulties were a reflection primarily of the size of the organization or were caused by some other factors could not be determined in this study.

However, respondents at MRD claimed that communication in their organization was rather effective and fast. They claimed that MRD effectively uses the Internet and email services, staff meetings, and individual conferences to communicate with its staff and other stakeholders.

The respondents at both organizations acknowledged the importance of communication for an effective implementation of the plans. In order to improve communication, the respondents at SCY suggested the effective use of emails and the Internet to communicate with staff and other stakeholders. They also said that information could be shared during staff meetings, annual retreats, and through newsletters. At MRD, which already seems to use the strategies that SCY personnel wanted to see implemented in their organization, the respondents suggested more effective use of staff meetings for information sharing. They also recommended the use of brief communiqués to update employees on the status of the plan.

Timeline

For an effective implementation of strategic plans, all respondents at MRD and SCY emphasized the importance of a clear and specific timeline because a timeline makes the staff accountable, gives them focus and clarity of roles, and keeps the organization and the staff on track.

The respondents at MRD claimed that their strategic plans had a clear timeline, and, according to respondents, it had a specific due date, a quarterly due date, and a designated quarter and a fiscal year in which it was going to be done. All three plans at MRD had a specific timeline, and the respondents claimed that timeline was one of the reasons for the effective implementation of the plans.

In contrast, the respondents at SCY said their last two plans did not have a timeline. Moreover, the plans were perceived as too broad and confusing, and no one was designated to implement the recommendations. The first plan at SCY had a timeline, but it was not specific. Moreover, it was not clearly communicated to staff members as to

who was responsible for implementing the plan. Ken, the CEO, acknowledged that the plan at SCY did not have a specific timeline. According to him, the reason for keeping the plans open was that he wanted the entire organization to take responsibility in implementing the plans and not just a few staff members. But Steven said, “It [this approach] did not work, and except for Ken, no one cared to look at it [the plan] or talk about it.”

To summarize, the respondents from both organizations claimed that timelines are important for an effective implementation of the plans. Implementation at MRD was effective because of its specific timeline where as at SCY, the staff members said that they were not clear about their responsibilities.

Quality of the Strategic Plan Document and Process

The staff respondents at both organizations talked about the nature and importance of the final document, though the nonstaff respondents did not emphasize the document that much. The reason may have been that they were not directly involved in the implementation of the plans. The staff respondents at both organizations believed that for a plan to be implemented effectively, the process must be participatory—almost every staff respondent used the term “bottom-up planning process”—and the final plan should be written in a such a way that the staff members can understand it and integrate it into their daily work. The CEO at MRD acknowledged the importance of a bottom-up planning process. According to her, an effective way of involving and enabling the staff to use the document is by way of integrating, discussing, and reviewing it during staff meetings.

The respondents and the CEO at MRD talked favorably about their final written document, and they appreciated the style of presentation. The document at MRD is concrete, specific, and discrete activities are described. One of the staff respondents at MRD said that when the plan is specific and clear, it attracts and motivates people to read it, including the frontline staff. The final documents at MRD attracted readers' attention because they were less wordy and they used boxes and bullet points to highlight important points in the narrative.

In contrast, the respondents at SCY said that their final document was too verbose and unwieldy. A frontline staff member acknowledged that the document at SCY was too technical and lengthy, which discouraged her from reading it. The other two staff respondents also expressed similar opinions. They opined that it was too hard for staff, especially frontline staff, to read and use document.

Another reason that the plan did not appeal to the staff at SCY was that it did not capture their ideas. Steven said: "I don't remember people saying any of this and I almost think Ken put a lot of stuff in—his vision—and it wasn't really reflective of the group." The study reveals that the final document is important and must appeal to staff members. Also, the respondents suggested putting the document in grid form or something with bullet points or a short summary or a handbook for the staff in order to make it more appealing.

Recommendations to Improve the Planning and Implementation Process

The respondents offered two recommendations to improve the planning and implementation process in the future. They were: conduct a periodic evaluation of the plans and form a follow-up committee.

Evaluation of the Plans

Respondents at both organizations emphasized the importance of evaluation. Although most respondents did not specify a particular method or frequency of evaluation of their plans, they all recommended evaluation in some format. Currently, evaluation did not seem to be a priority to either organization, as it is not integrated in the strategic plan final document of either organization. Respondents said that MRD does an annual internal evaluation, whereas, SCY has yet to evaluate its plans. The CEO at SCY said that evaluation is contingent on the needs of a particular program and requirements from donors.

Although neither organization has a specific evaluation plan, the respondents emphasized the importance of evaluation and used different phrases to emphasize its importance. Linda said: "Evaluation holds people accountable," Molly said: "It keeps you on track and focused." Chris suggested that "it is a reality check."

At MRD, respondents said that the evaluation process helps the organization make needed changes in the plan or to put the organization back on track. However, Chris at SCY cautioned that evaluations should not be used to blame people, but rather, should be used as an opportunity to help the organization critically analyze its existing strategies and the effectiveness of those strategies so that it can help the organization move forward and be effective in future.

Formation of a Follow-up or Implementation Committee

Respondents at both organizations recognized the importance of a follow-up or implementing committee for implementation of strategic plans. MRD, after the second strategic plan, formed a management team to monitor the implementation of strategic

plans. The management team monitors the implementation of the strategic plans and other programs. The team also guides the staff and provides them input and resources necessary for implementation of the plan.

In contrast, SCY did not have an implementing committee and, except for the CEO, all other respondents at SCY recommended formation of an implementing or follow-up committee to implement the plans. Frank, the Board representative, recommended formation of a follow-up team, but suggested that Board representatives should be on the committee. Frank said that this tactic would encourage the Board members to be more involved in the process.

Recommendations Unique to SCY

The planning process at SCY was less participatory than was the case at MRD. The planning committee at SCY did not have representation by their clients, frontline staff, or external stakeholders. In order to make the process participatory, the respondents said that key stakeholders and the staff, particularly senior managers, must be given more opportunities to share information and participate in the process. In order to encourage participation of key stakeholders, the respondents suggested having small group meetings, surveys, and one-on-one meetings, especially with the senior level staff and frontline staff members. Chris and Frank justified the participation of senior managers and frontline staff members by noting that these senior managers provide realistic information in meetings because of their experience within the organization and working with the clients.

In order to improve the planning process, the staff respondents suggested a bottom-up planning approach. This approach was quite effective at MRD. According to

Frank, in a bottom-up approach, “Everyone gets to participate, regardless of what you’re doing, if you’re trying to convince someone to merge or somebody to affiliate, you can’t just mandate it down, you have to make sure everybody gets behind it.” The staff respondents strongly emphasized a bottom-up approach because the plan benefits the entire organization; therefore, everyone must be given opportunities to participate in the planning process. This will increase ownership and make implementation of the plan more effective.

Recommendations Unique to MRD

The research study indicated that MRD currently does not provide sufficient training to its staff or its board members as compared to SCY. This is due, primarily, to insufficient funds, insufficient staffing preventing the substitution of a staff member when another member is sent for training, and limited space and training facilities. MRD respondents emphasized the need for more training to help them learn and become aware of the plans, new software, and acquisition of new techniques and skills that are important for an effective implementation.

The respondents at MRD recommended more training for the staff and the Board members. They suggested that training must be provided at the beginning and during the implementation of the plan. Frank at SCY said: “Training helps them understand how the process works and if everyone is hearing the same thing... clear about their responsibilities and how the plan is to be used.” While training facilitates effective implementation of strategic plans, it also enhances staff members’ understanding, appreciation, and application of the strategic plans.

Changes that Strategic Plans Brought about at SCY and MRD

Both organizations are in the process of implementing their third plan. The research study's interview data, as well as the organizations' annual reports and other documents, all indicate that both organizations have grown over the period of time and that the successive strategic plans have created a positive impact on these organizations.

The respondents identified various types of growth after implementing strategic plans in their respective organizations. For example, the CEO at SCY emphasized, among other things, a strategic plan's role in keeping people excited about what they are doing and helping an organization stay responsive to clients' needs and changing environment. Many of the interviewees at both organizations claimed that the plans provided a sense of direction to the organization and its employees.

Some interviewees even used the metaphor of a roadmap to characterize how a strategic plan functions. Michael elaborated, "The plan gives us a clear direction where to go and how to get there." Because of its clarity of direction, the respondents at SCY said that they are able to pick and choose programs that are beneficial to the clients and programs that are in line with the organization's mission. Carmen listed three important changes that the strategic plans have brought about in MRD: a clear focus, a methodical way of looking at things, and a way of keeping the entire staff on the same page.

The implementation of the plans has also brought both organizations closer to their local communities. The respondents claimed that their organization is now better known in the community and, as a result, they are better able to promote their programs among their donors, motivate more people to work as volunteers, and raise more funds locally.

The implementation of the plan has also brought about positive changes in the networking and advocacy of the organizations. The respondents said that strategic plans have made MRD a leading organization in San Diego in the area of networking and advocacy. SCY networks with its partner agencies, schools, and its field offices. The plans have helped these organizations work for the common interests of its clients and community. The respondents said that networking helped them share information, especially with regard to mobilizing funds and government policies and programs common to partner organizations.

Finally, the respondents in both organizations claimed that their strategic plans have increased Board participation. At SCY, as a result of its second strategic plan, the organization formed several committees to implement its recommendations, and all these committees have Board representatives. At MRD, the Board members are involved in raising funds and actively participating in meetings and other activities of the organization.

A Postscript to the Discussion of Findings

Prior to the start of this research study, the researcher met with the respondents of the study and told them he would share the results of the study once completed, if they desired; none did so. However, to include some semblance of member checking into the research process, the researcher decided to share a short summary of the findings with a few representatives of the two organizations, Social Concern for Youth (SCY) and Migrants Rehabilitation and Development (MRD), the subject of the research. The following members were selected for member check interviews: the directors at both

organizations and two staff members from each organization—a senior and a frontline staff member. Meetings were arranged after an exchange of e-mails and telephone calls.

Each person contacted responded in a positive manner, except the CEO at SCY. After several unsuccessful attempts to contact the CEO, the researcher finally reached the Board representative from SCY who had participated in the research study and he agreed to meet with the researcher. Ultimately, those selected provided the researcher with a reasonably diverse cross-section of the types of people who had been involved in the study.

The member check was a fifteen minute face-to-face interview. Prior to the interview, the researcher provided the members with a two-page summary of the findings for review. With prior permission from each respondent, the interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed. The following were some of the questions asked during the member check interviews:

2. Is there anything in this summary of findings that you believe is incorrect or exaggerated?
6. Are there things mentioned here that you think are really important in understanding what happened during the planning and implementation processes in your organization?
7. Is there anything that should have been mentioned that was not discussed in this brief summary?
8. In what way will the findings help to improve the future planning and implementation of strategic planning in the organization?
9. Do you have any other comments about the summary of findings?

General Agreement

All four respondents agreed that the summary was well-prepared. For example, according to Carmen, the CEO of MRD, the summary covered most of the major points that were discussed during our interview. The respondents at both organizations also agreed that the planning process was better organized as compared to the implementation process. At MRD, the planning process had a clear timeline and structure. The implementation of the plan was also well-organized, but unfortunately, the implementation did not take place as planned. The major reasons were uncertain or unpredictable funding and staff turnover. Lora, a frontline staff member at MRD said: “We had a tough time this year with funding and staff turnover slowed down the implementation. It just shows how it can be challenging to make progress as a non-profit towards a strategic plan when you’re having those kinds of difficulties.” Lora’s perspective was consistent with what had been reported in both the write-up of the study’s results and in the summary of that write-up prepared for member checking purposes.

Carmen, the CEO, also confirmed reports about the significance of staff turnover and the difficulties this caused the organization, in general and in plan implementation, particularly. Both themes, but especially the second one, had been discussed in the findings discussion and in the summary of the findings developed for member checking purposes. Carmen said: “The loss of that person—assigned to supervise the implementation—and the uncertainty of funds, certainly affected our implementation ... now I have to fundraise aggressively to keep our programs alive.” In spite of these constraints, Lora claimed that implementation was quite successful at MRD because the

CEO provided an effective leadership role, and she kept the plan on track. This point also had been made in the findings discussion.

A Dissenting Opinion

Frank, the Board representative at SCY, did not fully agree with the findings. He claimed that the role of the Board was not mentioned in the summary report. According to him, the Board played an important role in providing leadership during the planning and implementation processes, in particular in prioritizing and implementing the plan. He said: “Now the implementation committee was the Board ... the Board was responsible for picking out five or six particular areas every year for implementation.”

Unfortunately, the issue of the Board’s involvement, particularly in prioritizing and implementing the strategic plan, was not mentioned by any of the respondents, including Frank, during the initial interview. Steven, a senior staff member at SCY, was one of the few interviewees who had acknowledged the role of the Board during the interview process, but he described the Board’s role in a fairly circumscribed way that was quite different than Frank described in his member checking interview (but not in his original interview). In the original interview, Steven had said, “A number of Board members are involved right now in kind of a marketing process, trying to figure out...how to sell itself because we do a really broad variety of types of services.”

The role of the Board was strongly emphasized by both respondents during the member check interviews. Given the very limited reference to the Board’s involvement in the initial round of interviews, references to the Board’s work during the member checking interviews may indicate that the Board has only recently become active in matters other than marketing and raising funds. According to Frank, the Board

representative, the Board was always involved in providing leadership to the organization. He speculated that that the reason that the role of the Board did not come up in the initial interviews was because the staff members were not aware of the role and involvement of the Board. He said: “The staff was not aware of this part—involvement of the Board—which you know, prioritized three or four things every year.” Of course, Frank also had not said much about the Board’s role in the initial interview with him.

No matter what the discrepancies discussed above mean, one thing they do show is that there was no clear communication at SCY, a point emphasized in the original write-up of findings. Frank acknowledged this lack of communication and claimed that this report might help to improve the communication system at SCY.

Other Points of Agreement

Agreement about the utility of the report. All four respondents during the member check interview agreed that the research findings would help their organization to understand and improve the planning and implementation process of strategic planning in the future. The CEO at MRD and the Board representative at SCY said they would discuss the findings at their Board meetings. Carmen, the CEO at MRD said: “I will share this report with Jeanette—the Board President. She might want to discuss the report during the Board retreat which is next week. I am sure that the Board will consider some of these suggestions before we do the next planning.” Carmen also said that the report might help the Board to plan and respond to important issues such as uncertain funding and staff turnover. She said:

What if, you know, the person who you have designated to implement the plan is no longer on staff and what if the budget has been decreased by fifty percent? I think it is a

great opportunity for the board and the staff to think together and plan effective implementation strategies. The problem will continue, but if we want to be successful we need to change our strategies.

Agreement about using an external facilitator. At SCY all three plans were facilitated by the CEO, except the last plan which had a part-time facilitator at the initial stage. All respondents, particularly the staff members, emphasized the need for an external facilitator in order to create an atmosphere of free flow of information and ideas. With regard to the CEO's style of facilitating, Steven commented, "His [the CEO's] style of facilitating is never clear. He takes notes when we speak and [we're] not sure whether he actually heard what we said. He may be writing what triggers him, you know...so this document could be helpful in challenging that model; kind of simply saying, 'you need an outside facilitator.'"

Agreement about implications for the future. With regard to using the findings to improve future planning and implementation of a strategic plan at SCY, Frank, the Board representative said: "As a Board member, I think I would be very disappointed with some of the findings because if someone at SCY is saying that document was too technical and had too many recommendations. The senior staff members participated in the planning process as well as the Board meetings and how can they now say that the document was too technical." However, with regard to using the report to improve the future planning and implementation processes he said: "Yeah, it would help because we would try to figure out what the heck is going on because it is the same people that are participating in exactly what I am describing. It might help to improve our communication system." Steven said: "This is such a good piece of information for any organizationI think it

reflects the reality of SCY. I don't think it negates our quality of our services. It just reflects the reality of how we deal with strategic plans.”

Conclusion

In the comparative part of this case study research, the two cases that were studied were viewed from different angles. An effort was made to analyze the common factors that facilitated and inhibited the strategic planning and implementation process. Common factors that facilitated the successful implementation of strategic plans were identified as: leadership, the planning committee, use of an external facilitator, and the retention of staff. The common factors that inhibited the planning and implementation process were limited or unstable funds and workload.

Another aspect of the comparative study included analyzing major differences between the planning and/or implementation processes in each organization and the implications of these differences. The major differences were: effectiveness of communication, a clear timeline, and the quality of the final document. Additionally, due to how each organization put these elements into practice differently, varying outcomes resulted. Hence, it could be posited that some factors enabled implementation in one organization while the same factors were not so successful in the other.

The next point of comparison between the case studies analyzed the recommendations that respondents suggested to improve future planning and the implementation of strategic plans. They were: conducting periodic evaluations, forming a follow-up or an implementation committee, and improving quality of communication. The study also analyzed recommendations specific to these organizations. The

respondents at SCY suggested that the organization should improve the planning process; in contrast, MRD recommended more training.

A final aspect of the comparative study was to analyze the changes that the plans have brought about in each organization. Both organizations experienced major growth. The visible evidence of this growth can be seen in the increased number of programs, staff, and budget in both organizations. The respondents in both cases said that strategic plan was a road map that gave them direction and resulted in positive change.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS

This final chapter briefly reviews the purpose of the study, the methods that were used, and the major findings. It also provides recommendations to practitioners who intend to initiate strategic planning in their organizations. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the researcher's experiences during this research process and identifies areas for future research.

Brief Review of Problem, Purpose, and Research Questions

As was discussed in Chapter 1, in order to respond to the changing needs and growing competition—internally and externally—and to improve organizational effectiveness, many organizations turn to a strategic planning process (Larson, 1998). In order to produce a viable plan for organizational improvement, they often invest a lot of money, time, personnel, and other resources. Unfortunately, in spite of this lengthy and costly exercise, plans sometimes fail to produce the desired results (Speculand, 2009). Although strategic planning has benefited some organizations, others struggle to find the benefit. It is unfortunate to see the product of costly and time-consuming efforts sitting on the shelf and collecting dust.

According to McCluskey (2002), strategic planning failure occurs because, all too often, plans are developed by a single group member, facilitator or a committee. Furthermore, implementation is left to a single individual or a small group who often had no connection in developing the plans. Mara (2000) claims that when the implementation of a plan is limited to an individual or to a small group it can lack the support of key stakeholders. Mara (2000) provides some explanations for this lack of implementation commitment including inadequate staff and heavy workloads. The literature

overwhelmingly claims that the failure of strategic planning results, in large part, from the fact that most organizations do not have a clear implementation strategy and the implementation process in most organizations is less precisely organized and less of a priority than the development process (Barrows 2009, Fogg 1999).

Thus, the overarching purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the relevance of strategic planning in improving organizational effectiveness, discern the processes used by organizations to engage in strategic planning, and analyze the extent to which the plans were implemented. This study sought to understand the role of key stakeholders in developing and implementing plans. The goal was to develop insights that might assist organizations involved in strategic planning processes. Specifically, the study sought to document some patterns of the planning process that would be useful to organizations that wish to improve and become more efficient in enacting their articulated mission.

The study used semi-structured interviews of selected respondents to obtain information about their perspectives of strategic planning and the roles they played during the planning process. In order to understand the implementation process, the respondents were asked to comment on the implementation strategies in their organization. With regard to the planning process, the respondents were specifically asked about the initial preparation, relevance of the planning committee, importance of involving key stakeholders, role of the facilitator, and the quality of the final written document. With regard to the implementation, the study analyzed various factors that facilitated and inhibited the implementation of plans.

Brief Review of the Methods

The cases depicted in this research illustrate the planning and implementation process of strategic planning in two nonprofit organizations. Six people from each organization were selected for a face-to-face, one-hour interview. The respondents included the CEO, two senior staff members who were on the planning committee, a Board representative, a consultant, and staff members. The planned methodology for the study also entailed interviewing one external stakeholder/client who was on the planning committee from each of the organizations. Interviews of external stakeholders/clients did not occur because SCY did not have external stakeholders/clients on their planning committee. The second and the third plans at MRD had a few external stakeholders but they could not be contacted. Instead, the researcher interviewed one frontline staff member from both organizations that was not on the planning committee. This turned out to be an important source of information because the frontline staff members shared the perspective of other staff members. Moreover, they were also actively involved in the implementation of the plans.

The study used a semi-structured interview format approach with open-ended questions. This approach allowed the researcher to explore topics with the participants in a manner similar to a natural conversation. Interviews were audio recorded with prior permission; the recording of interviews enabled the researcher to capture the raw data so that original quotes and specific terms used by the respondents in a particular environment were not lost. Interviews were transcribed within 48 hours by a professional transcriber. This rapid transcription enabled the researcher to plan and make changes for the next interview.

All interviews were coded. The initial coding categories were adapted from the research questions that were articulated in the proposal and were grounded in the planning and implementation of the strategic planning process. After the initial coding, the researcher examined all the interviews together to extract coherent descriptions and themes that addressed the research questions.

In the first part of the analysis, a description of each case was constructed and emergent qualitative themes within the case were identified. In the second part, the study analyzed and described qualitative themes that appeared across the cases. In the third part, a comparative study of both cases was made to identify elements that facilitated and inhibited the implementation of strategic planning in these organizations.

Brief Review of Findings

This section briefly summarizes the research findings. The section is organized around the four research questions and reviews findings about both the strategic planning process and the implementation of the plans.

Prior to initiating the planning process, both organizations conducted retreats for committee members and several levels of meetings with staff and the Board to ensure their commitment and support. This enabled each organization and its staff members to understand and reach agreement about the process itself. At SCY, retreats and other preparatory sessions were conducted mainly for senior staff members and the Board while at MRD most employees could attend the retreat or participate in the preparatory sessions. In both organizations, the committee members were chosen out of the group that participated in the initial preparatory sessions or the retreats.

Both organizations formed a strategic planning committee. The committee members were selected from different departments and programs and were chosen mainly for their knowledge and experience. In both organizations, the committee members mostly represented the staff, department heads, and the Board. With regard to outside representation, MRD had three external representatives and SCY did not have outside representatives but an intern did participate. Neither organization had client representatives on the planning committee.

Both organizations hired external consultants to facilitate the planning process and the study indicated that having a facilitator was a positive factor in the planning process. The role of the external consultant was limited at SCY. His role was mainly to introduce the topic and enable the Board and the planning committee to begin to think about what they wanted to do and decide on a particular direction they wanted the planning process to take. The CEO favored an internal facilitator and he functioned in this role throughout the strategic planning processes. However, the staff members favored an external facilitator. At MRD, the facilitator was involved throughout the planning process and helped the committee members to reflect critically and establish a clear direction. The facilitator was neutral and, therefore, the staff members could share ideas and opinions without fear--this was a missing element at SCY.

Both organizations used SWOT analyses to assess the external and internal environment. This process enabled the committee to analyze the existing programs and determine which programs must be continued and which programs must be terminated. The study revealed that the strategic planning processes in both organizations were very

similar, and to a large extent, they followed the guidelines recommended by Bryson (2004), Allison (2005), and Swayne (2006) in developing the plans.

The researcher also analyzed the factors that facilitated and inhibited the implementation of strategic plans in these two organizations. The study revealed that in comparison to the process used in developing the plan, the implementation phase was not clearly organized and monitored in both organizations. The common factors that facilitated the successful implementation of strategic plans were: leadership, a clear timeline, and the retention of staff. The common factors that inhibited the implementation of strategic plans were: lack of collaborative and inspiring leadership, lack of involvement of key stakeholders, limited or unstable funds, lack of clarity of the final document, and heavy workloads.

The role of CEO was strongly emphasized in both organizations in the creation and implementation of strategic plans. The study revealed that leadership was engaged in the creation of plans but this was less so with the implementation of plans. The CEO at MRD played an important role with regard to the implementation of that organization's different strategic plans; however, there was not much evidence of this at SCY. The CEO at SCY expected the staff and departments to take leadership roles, but this did not happen and the result was that implementation of the plans at SCY clearly lacked direction and guidance.

The study revealed the importance of strategic plans having a clear timeline. MRD had a fairly effective timeline and the respondents there claimed the timeline was one of the main reasons for a successful implementation. At SCY, the last two strategic plans did not have any timeline. Although both of these organizations emphasized the

importance of evaluation and claimed that a clear timeline would help them in evaluating the plans, neither of them seemed to have evaluated their plans or developed an evaluation tool that was integrated in the strategic plan's final document. MRD claimed they had been doing an annual internal evaluation, but there were not any documents or evaluation reports to confirm this claim.

Lack of money was expressed as a major concern in both organizations because they were totally dependent on donors and government agencies for funding. Although funding did not create any major impact in the implementation of the plans, SCY reported that it had to delay a few programs and MRD had to cut down a few programs due to lack of funds. The research study affirms what was found in the existing literature, which states that a lack of funds is a major concern in the implementation of strategic plans. This study revealed that a lack of funds not only affected the implementation but also affected the staff's morale.

The study indicated that heavy workloads were a major concern in both organizations. Since the staff members were busy with their routine work, they did not have much time for the additional work necessary to implement their strategic plans. The study revealed that, although MRD was a small organization, workload was not a major concern and the organization was able to implement most of its recommendations. This success on the part of MRD is due to a number of factors. First, the strategic planning process was integrated into their daily work. Second, the organization maintained a somewhat effective communication system. Finally, the strategic plan's final written document was concrete, specific, and discrete activities were described. By contrast, at

SCY, the final strategic planning document was too verbose, technical, and lengthy. This discouraged staff members from reading the plan, much less implementing it.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, the focus will be on two issues suggested by the findings: (a) the importance of making the strategic planning process a group effort and (b) factors that appear to be associated with the effective implementation of plans. For each of these topics, major themes that emerged during the research study will be discussed and references to the existing literature will provide theoretical support for the findings or identify areas where the findings may challenge conventional wisdom. Presumably, this attempt might help organizations and practitioners involved in strategic planning improve their planning and implementation processes and helps them make positive changes in their organizations.

Making the Planning Process a Group Effort

Regardless of organizational size, the literature suggests that involving the entire organization in the planning process greatly improves the chances of effectively implementing the plan (Fogg, 1999). The likelihood of a successful strategic planning effort is enhanced when they know, understand, and buy into the plan. Weisman (2003) suggested that a retreat is the best way to initiate the process and to reach an initial agreement among important players.

Both organizations in this study started the process with a retreat and the data suggest that the retreat helped each organization to engage organization members in the strategic planning process. In part because of its large size, the retreat at SCY was conducted only for senior staff and the board members, while at MRD the retreat was

organized for the entire staff as well as the Board members. This broader involvement had positive impacts on MRD because the entire organization became aware of the strategic planning process-taking place; the retreat prepared staff members and other key stakeholders for the exercise; and the retreat created a strong sense of ownership of the strategic plan. At SCY, the frontline staff (and other key stakeholders that were not on the planning committee) did not get acquainted with the planning process. This lack of involvement of frontline staff had a negative impact when the plan was actually implemented since the frontline staff did not feel a sense of ownership with the plan and many did not care to use the plan. These results obviously indicate the need for thorough preparation and reinforce the importance not only of holding a retreat but also of inviting key stakeholders to participate in the retreat.

Engaging large numbers of people in the retreat was also important for issues other than ownership and buy-in. The retreats that were studied enabled the organizations to negotiate agreements among key decision makers about the overall strategic planning efforts and the key planning steps. According to Bryson (2004), the support and commitment of key decision makers are vital if strategic planning in an organization is to succeed and make the implementation effective. The initial retreat also enabled the organization to identify which persons, groups, and departments should be on the strategic planning committee. For an effective planning process, Bryson (2004) suggests involving three levels of people on the committee: top decision makers, middle managers, and frontline personnel.

In both organizations, the committee members were representatives of various departments and programs and were chosen mainly for their knowledge and experience.

In large organizations such as SCY, it might not be possible to include all stakeholders on the planning committee. In order to address this dilemma, Bryson (2004), suggested including those stakeholders who have a major stake in the organization. However, the staff respondents suggested that it was beneficial to include the staff as part of the process. They indicated value in providing opportunities for everyone including staff members and key stakeholder to share their ideas.

Both organizations hired external consultants to facilitate the planning process. Strategic planning proponents such as Swayne (2006), Allison (2005), and Bryson (2004) recommend the use of a facilitator, but they do not clearly specify whether this should be an internal or external facilitator. Bryson (2004), however, recommends a skilled facilitator who can challenge people to understand where they are, where they are going and how they might achieve their purpose. In this research study, the staff respondents, in particular, expressed favor for an external facilitator, because an external facilitator is perceived as neutral. Additionally, the staff members indicated that they were more comfortable sharing ideas and opinions with an outside facilitator since they perceived less fear of reprisal. This was quite noticeable at SCY where the role of the external consultant was limited. It was evident during the interviews that many of the committee members and other stakeholders, especially the staff members who were not on the committee, were hesitant to share their ideas because the CEO facilitated much of the planning process.

Both organizations in this study used the ubiquitous SWOT analysis technique to assess the external and internal environment. The strategic planning processes were quite similar and they followed the guidelines recommended by Bryson (2004), Allison (2005),

and Swayne (2006) in developing the plans. The SWOT analyses enabled these organizations to analyze various trends and changes that impacted them, and they identified strengths on which to build and challenges that needed to be addressed sooner or later. Based on the data gathered, the committee members identified various strategic directions that were further divided into two sub-categories: The programs that should be continued and programs that should be terminated.

The planning processes in these organizations could be described as fairly effective and—to a large extent—the planning processes were a group effort. The staff members maintained that they put in a lot of money, time, and resources to develop their plans. Their final written documents indicate that the planning process was a collective effort and as a result they were able to produce a final document.

Commitment to implementing the document, which is the topic of the next subsection, seemed to be related to the extent of involvement in the planning process.

Involvement in the planning process, in turn, was influenced by the size of the organization, but size did not appear to be the only factor. The larger organization also tended to minimize the role of the external facilitator, which, in turn, limited input from many members of the organization.

Factors Associated with Effective Implementation of the Plan

Implementation is at the heart of how to make any kind of change in organizations. Plans are necessary but insufficient. Bryson (2004) states that plans must be effectively implemented in order to achieve their intended purpose. In this section, the researcher attempts to analyze whether the strategic plans achieved the desired results, and identify the factors that contributed to or inhibited the effective implementation of

strategic plans. The dominant factors were: full and active executive support, sufficient money and other resources, the quality of the final written document, and a clear timeline.

Full and active executive support. Whether strategic planning is occurring in a department or in a complete organization, a successful strategic plan requires a full and active commitment from executives, senior managers, and staff members directly involved in the implementation of the plans (Barrows, 2009). The research also posits that executive leaders must lead, encourage, and follow-up on the plan for it to be effectively implemented.

Both organizations acknowledged the importance of leadership and they emphasized the role of their CEOs in the effective implementation of plans. Bryson (2004) states that without effective leadership focused on both planning and implementation, strategic planning simply would not happen. Allison (2005) further emphasizes the importance of commitment and support from top leadership, especially the CEOs, the Board members, and senior managers. The CEOs in these organizations were committed and played an important role in the development of the plans.

The study revealed that the implementation of plans at MRD was more effective than at SCY. The CEO at MRD took primary responsibility for managing the implementation of the plans. She kept track of progress and also paid attention to all the details. The respondents called her a “cheerleader.” As a cheerleader, she kept the process on track, encouraged people, provided opportunities and freedom to staff, and guided the team through any difficult and challenging situations. They accepted her leadership and trusted her knowledge and commitment to the organization.

The CEO at MRD formed a management committee to oversee the implementation of the plans. The committee met every week to discuss progress and analyze techniques employed to implement the plans. We might surmise it is important, especially in nonprofit organizations where workload is high and demanding to remind people that something positive will result from getting together to talk about what is important and then doing something about it.

The implementation scenario at SCY was a bit different. Staff members at SCY certainly appreciated the CEO for his many years of committed service and his contributions to building the organization. He was knowledgeable and experienced, but his leadership style and management approach were strongly hierarchical in nature. As a consequence, the organization did not have an implementation committee. The CEO did not feel the need for it since he was managing the implementation of the plans by himself. He defended his approach and said that he did not want to limit participation to a few staff members or departments. He envisioned the strategic plan as something that would involve the entire organization, not just a few people or any particular department. He wanted the entire organization to take initiative and feel responsible for implementing the plan. The idea sounds good in theory, but—without any structure around the implementation process—it did not work well at SCY. Ultimately, no one was responsible and moreover, the plan was left to employees to implement without much guidance.

To some extent, the problems that emerged during implementation could also be traced back to the planning process, itself. Even though the organization had a balanced planning committee, staff respondents who were on the committee claimed that their

responsibilities were limited and that their role was simply to provide information to the CEO who would create the plan for them. The process did not appear to be participatory; one respondent, for instance, said: “We were there to supply information to him—the CEO.” Therefore, the staff members did not feel ownership of the plan. One of the respondents said: “It was his plan, and he wanted it.”

The staff members, the Board, and other key stakeholders at SCY highly commended the CEO for building the organization and establishing its visibility in the community. This resulted in numerous advantages and increased opportunities that benefited the organization. Such visibility contributed to fund raising and attracted volunteers despite some issues with teamwork. SCY is a large organization and instead of forming and strengthening various levels of the leadership team, the CEO worked with a few staff members who presumably were familiar with his approach and supported his ideas. According to Bolman (1997), the task of leadership is to help people develop leadership qualities and provide a sense of direction and commitment for its members.

Money and other resources. Money, staff competencies, and organizational structure are important elements for the effective implementation of any plans. As was discovered in the research, the absence of these elements not only hinders the effective implementation of a plan but also often discourages the staff from even focusing on implementation issues. Money was a major concern in both organizations because they totally depended on outside sources for funding. They had to delay or cut back on some of their programs due to the lack of money. This discouraged the staff and affected the morale at both organizations. In order to increase staff competence and morale, both

organizations suggested training, motivational programs, rewards, and creating a friendly office atmosphere.

Staff competence could be an issue in both organizations, and such a low level of expertise and experience can be expected to interfere with the implementation of plans. Both organizations experienced this dilemma. However, at MRD, the CEO and a senior level staff member championed the implementation of the plans. This made implementation easier. As a champion, the CEO was devoted to the successful implementation of the plan.

The decision-making was centralized in both organizations. At MRD, the CEO and a team of a few senior staff members made decisions. Because it is a small organization, it did not adversely affect the organization. However, at SCY, decision-making often followed a top down approach where the CEO made most of the decisions. This affected the implementation of the plan. The staff members did not feel like they were part of the implementation phase and the plan did not have much meaning to them and to their work.

Clarity of the final written document. The final written documents at both organizations were well written. Both organizations appeared to have spent a lot of time and a large sum of money and resources developing the documents. At SCY, the document could be described as sweeping and technical. The staff appeared to be less motivated when it came time to implement the plan. At MRD, the document included a clear timeline and specific objectives which made the implementation rather easy.

Based on the researcher's observations, final documents are often too technical and scholarly in most organizations, because experts with knowledge and experience on

the topic often prepare them. When documents are too complex, staff members often lose interest in reading or using them. This was strongly expressed in the research study, especially by the staff respondents at SCY. In such situations, in order to make implementation effective, the document must be integrated into the organization's daily activities and communicated through many channels—such as reprinting it in its newsletter, posting it on its website, and referring back to it as often as possible. Kouzes (2007) states that people who have the greatest clarity about their work and organization have the highest degree of commitment to the organization.

According to Swayne (2006), in order for strategic planning to achieve its objectives, the plan must be integrated into employees' job descriptions and performance appraisal standards. Everyone—from secretary to CEO—should find the strategic plan relevant to their position and work. For Swayne, an effective way to accomplish this linkage is to create duties within the job descriptions related specifically to the strategic management process. The research study does not demonstrate that either organization made any attempt to follow the suggestions made by Swayne. However, both organizations used their newsletter to write success stories of the plans and MRD seems to have taken some concrete steps to integrate the plans into the organization's regular activities by discussing it during staff meetings, training, and recognizing and celebrating completed tasks.

In order to use the plan effectively and keep it alive, an organization should make efforts to bring the vision and goals of the strategic plan into the ongoing activities of their group, even though these regular activities may not be specifically mentioned in the

plan. As much as possible, the organization must use the goals that it has stated in the plan as a reference point for everyday decision-making.

A clear timeline. Strategic plans are commonly written to cover a period of three to five years and they typically contain many goals and objectives. If it is a multi-year plan, organizations must not try to tackle every recommendation in the first year or wait for the last year to implement the plan (Fogg, 1999). In order to achieve its objectives and be effective, organizations must plan to address their plan's initiatives. Allison (2005) recommends developing an annual operating plan and a supporting annual budget every year based on the strategic plan. The operating plan provides a detailed plan for the year and the budget—provides a cost estimate and other resources—needed in implementing the plan.

In both organizations, those interviewed suggested that a clear implementation timeline would have been helpful. Opinions about the clarity and usefulness of timelines varied across the two organizations. A timeline typically includes guidance about who is to do what and by when. A clear timeline is useful for the evaluation of plans because it provides information about strategies that are implemented and the ones that are not. The study revealed that MRD had a fairly clear timeline and it was integrated into the final document. At SCY, the first plan had a timeline but was not specific and the last two plans did not have a timeline. The sample timeline used at MRD (Figure 6.1) provides an example of a useful approach.

Table 7:1. Sample Timeline Used at MRD

Strategic Goal	Strategy	Objective	Responsibility	Timeline & Outcome
1. (Goal #1)	1.1 (first strategy to reach Goal #1)	(Objective to reach while implementing Strategy #1.1)	(Who's going to accomplish that objective)	(Due date and possible outcome)

This research study emphasized the importance of timelines. However, most strategic planning documents have a clear timeline for the planning process but do not have a clear timeline for the implementation.

Utilization of a facilitator. One of the two organizations employed an external facilitator throughout both the planning and to some extent during the implementation phases of their initiatives. Using a facilitator throughout the planning process is not unusual (though one of the two organizations that were studied did not do this). The use of a facilitator during the implementation phase was a bit unusual and, also, exceedingly helpful.

Normally, the role of a facilitator, whether internal or external, ends once the plan is developed. Due to financial constraints, organizations often are unable to utilize a facilitator's services once the designated work of developing the plan is completed. The plan is then left with the organization or with a team of staff members to implement. Often, these staff members are unqualified, inexperienced, and busy with their routine work. Moreover, these members are often brought in at the time of implementation.

The study indicates that a facilitator can play an important role not only in developing the plan but also in helping guide the organization during implementation of the plan. Because of their expertise and knowledge in the field of strategic planning, in

general, and the strategic plan that was developed, in particular, they can continue to guide the organization in the effective implementation of the plan. Therefore, organizations must figure out ways to utilize (and, of course, pay for) facilitator's services during the implementation process. Of course, if the facilitator is internal, he or she must be made a key player in the implementation process and should serve on any follow-up committee that is established to promote implementation.

Conclusion. This research revealed that the two organizations under study put considerably more emphasis on the development of strategic plans than on the implementation of the plans. According to Herbiniak (2006), implementation demands a great deal of time and attention. It must be dynamic and adoptive, responding to and compensating for unanticipated events. Herbiniak claims that planning and implementation processes are equally important. The study emphasized the role of leadership and the significance of money and employees' participation and competency in developing and implementing the plan.

Implications for Future Research

This section focuses on research recommendations that would expand our knowledge of strategic planning in nonprofit organizations, including the implementation process. Based on the cases included in this research, four recommendations are suggested. The field of nonprofit studies could benefit from additional research conducted by those engaged in the strategic planning process. Action research focused on the study of the impact of organization's previous strategic plans on subsequent planning processes would be a contribution. That is, organizations about to embark on a strategic planning process must ask if their earlier plans achieved their purpose and, if not, what

some of the reasons were. Plans are developed and implemented in order to bring organizational change and improve organizational performance, including service to its clients. Such introspection might be helpful as an alternative to the disparate approach to planning observed in the two cases profiled in this study. In both cases, the strategic planning process seemed to have little continuity from previous planning efforts. Neither organization appeared to learn much from earlier experiences with the planning process.

Strategic planning experts such as Bryson (2004), Allison (2005), Herbiniak (2006), and Swayne (2006) strongly emphasize the importance of ownership, support, and involvement of key stakeholders such as the executive director and board president throughout the entire process. What has not been emphasized to date, however, is a specific procedure to assess preparedness. Perhaps a process of studying the fate of previous strategic plans within an organization could serve as a way to foster preparedness.

Additional research is also warranted on the impact of an organization's size on the strategic planning process. In other words, it would help to determine if the size of the organization has anything to do with the effective development and implementation of plans. The research study being reported here revealed that the employees at MRD—a small organization—were more aware of the planning process taking place in the organization. This enabled them to be better prepared to engage in the planning and implementation process. At SCY, a larger organization, employees not on the committee were less aware of the planning process with an attendant negative impact on the implementation of the plans. A study with a much larger sample of large and small

organizations could presumably determine whether the size of each organization was indeed a relevant variable in strategic planning success.

A third major area of study could look at how organizations might generate more enthusiasm and have more specific objectives and goals when they are implementing a plan. In general, the organizations in this study expended a lot of money, time, and other resources in developing the plans, but they were noticeably less enthusiastic and less structured when actually implementing the plans. At SCY, the implementation of the plan was less of a priority than creating a plan and the staff members—i.e., the frontline staff members were mostly unaware of the plan that they were expected to implement. Both this study and the literature claim that in order for a plan to achieve its purpose, the commitment of staff, time and resources are necessary.

Finally, the planning and implementation process overall seems to be more effective in for-profit organizations than in nonprofit organizations, assuming that business' investments in strategic planning are an indicator of success. A comparative study could be conducted that compared strategic planning in nonprofit and for-profit organizations. This sort of study would help to identify and describe the numerous variables that are unique to for-profit organizations and that could possibly be applied to nonprofit environments. Furthermore, since leaders of nonprofit organizations are encouraged to borrow from the planning practices of for-profit organizations, it would be interesting to see how well nonprofit planning efforts and results compare with the efforts and results of for-profit planning efforts. Such a comparative study might help both sectors to improve the planning and implementation of strategic plans.

Potential Contributions

As mentioned earlier, typically, organizations spend a lot of time, money, and other resources to develop sensible and relevant plans. The two cases included in this study suggest that implementation can be a weak link. Perhaps this has something to do with a lack of clear implementation strategies or a lack of emphasis on implementation. This research suggests that additional focus on implementation might be beneficial.

In the case of this study, the implementation of the plan at MRD—a smaller organization—seemed to be more successful than in SCY—a larger organization—even though SCY had a better infrastructure, more money, and more personnel. MRD's relative success with implementation of its plan was not so much attributable to the fact that it was a small organization, however. Indeed, the size of the organization and the limited number of people who worked at MRD seemed to be limiting factors because so few people already had too many responsibilities before they took on the task of implementing the strategic plan.

Rather than its size, MRD's relative success with implementation seems mostly attributable to the fact that at MRD the implementation process was well planned. Moreover, the organization had a champion—i.e., the CEO—to guide and motivate the staff to implement the plan that had been developed. And, to some extent, MRD retained the services of its external strategic planning facilitator during the implementation process. The study therefore indicates that leaders, both those who are internal facilitators and those who come from the outside, can play an important role in the successful implementation of plans.

The study validates once again that leaders play an important role in the planning and implementation process. Interviewees in both SCY and MRD emphasized the importance of leadership; they said that leaders must be authentic and committed. The study revealed that the CEOs in these organizations played an important role in developing the plans and, as a result, they were able to produce a good final document in both organizations despite issues with implementation as already mentioned. Some staff respondents expressed that they perceived a lack of guidance. Hence, the study emphasizes that it is not enough to have a good plan but it must also be effectively implemented and leaders, particularly the CEOs, play an important role in the implementation.

Another important area for practitioners to consider improving upon the planning and implementation process is to effectively involve the frontline staff. Many organizations do not involve the frontline staff in developing the plan because plans are often developed by a consultant and with the help of a planning committee or top-level managers (Herbiniak, 2006). The study also revealed that both organizations did not effectively involve the frontline staff members while developing the plans. At MRD, two frontline staff members were on the planning committee and one served on the implementation committee, while SCY did not have any frontline staff members on the planning committee and the organization did not create an implementation committee. The staff members at MRD were fairly involved in the planning and implementation of the plans, and at SCY, the frontline staff members were not even aware of the plan. This lack of awareness had a negative impact at SCY as most of the staff members did not care to follow the plan. Larson (1998) states, "No involvement, no commitment ... If a

person has been involved in the planning process and has a little strategic input, they probably will not resist. People just don't like others laying plans on their doors without being involved" (p.5). According to Herbiniak (2006), successful strategic outcomes are achieved when those responsible for implementation are also part of the planning or formulation process.

Finally, organizations usually focus on the implementation process once the plans are fully developed. Only then do they start identifying personnel, funding sources and opportunities, and needed infrastructure to implement the organization's new plan. The study indicates that organizations must start planning the implementation as the development of the plan is in process. It might be less practical for organizations to plan the implementation without having some concrete recommendations. However, organizations do not need to wait for the plan to be completed in order to start the process of identifying areas of priorities, personnel, fiscal resources, organization's capacity, training, etc. Planning the implementation while the development of the strategic plan is still in process should make the implementation process easier and will maintain the continuity and, maybe even more important, the spirit of the strategic planning process.

Limitations and Significance of the Study

As with any research, this particular case study has limitations. Prior to starting the doctoral program, the researcher worked several years as the director of Catholic Charities. During this period, he initiated and participated in several strategic planning processes. His experience with strategic planning was limited to the understanding that plans were often initiated for two reasons: to raise funds and introduce

changes/restructuring for organizations. The researcher's limited experience with strategic planning must have affected the gathering and interpretation of data.

Even though the researcher was in one sense an insider with respect to strategic planning, he also was an outsider with limited contacts with local organizations.

Originally, five organizations were identified and evaluated for this research and out of that two organizations were selected for the research study. Of these two organizations, the researcher had some prior knowledge of one organization because it was the site where he conducted a case study for an advanced qualitative research course. Rubin (2005) emphasizes the importance of the researcher building contacts to provide more options in choosing organizations and the interview participants.

Another limitation was the researcher's language/accent. Some of the respondents seemed to find it difficult to understand some of the interview questions. Occasionally the researcher had to repeat some of the questions several times, and there were incidents where some of the respondents assumed they understood the questions and answered them without clarifying first.

In both organizations, the CEOs helped to select the respondents and the researcher had minimal or no choice in the selection. The choice of respondents was limited and the researcher had to stick with those respondents suggested by the CEOs. At SCY, after seeing the list of interviewees, one of the respondents commented that the CEO suggested people who would agree with his viewpoints. In both organizations, the researcher could not use the well-known snowball method to locate information-rich key informants who had a different view on the strategic planning and implementation process. At SCY, only a few members were involved in the planning and implementation

process and the staff members that were not on the committee were not even aware of the planning process. MRD was a smaller organization and that limited the available pool of respondents.

The researcher interviewed twelve people. Besides two frontline staff, other interviewees were directors, board members, and senior level staff members. The researcher could not interview more frontline staff or other key stakeholders such as clients and donors. Time limitations and organizational reluctance to include these individuals in the study both played a role.

This was a case study of only two nonprofit organizations and the results of the study cannot be generalized to the entire nonprofit sector. A search for the factors that go into creating an effective planning and implementation process will require additional cases. Insights gathered from a cross case study comparison of two nonprofit organizations—one small and one large—cannot necessarily be relied upon as prescriptions for effective planning and implementation of strategic plans.

Given these limitations, there is still considerable significance in the findings of this study that could be used to inform future research efforts on a broader array of organizations—nonprofit and for-profit. Donmoyer (1990) sums up the potential usefulness of case studies, such as these, recognizing that their findings may function heuristically rather than prescribing particular actions. Peters (2009) states that as researchers, our job is not to give answers but rather to enable leaders to ask better questions. This case study might allow organizations and practitioners to ask better questions—rather than provide a blueprint—as they seek to improve strategic planning as a tool to bring about changes in their organizations.

Researcher's Reflections and Final Conclusions

For Allison (2005), a strategic plan is more like a roadmap drawn to a new destination before the journey has been made. Careful thinking and planning make traveling easier. In the same way, strategic planning as a roadmap helps leaders analyze and articulate their vision about where they want to take the organization. A thorough planning process enables them to choose the best options available to reach the destination and helps organizations respond to changes and make appropriate adjustments. According to Allison, in this process, a strategic plan becomes a reference document and a map to assist leaders to reach the desired destination.

Bryson (2004) asserts that the future is uncertain and unpredictable. Plans are made to help navigate the turbulent environment. In fact, developing strategic plans has become very popular. They are often developed to improve organizational performance. They are tools in the search for greater efficiency in service provision, a means to adequately respond to environmental changes, and helpful in prioritizing the use of limited resources. According to Barrows (2009) 88% of the organizations today engage in some form of formal strategic planning. This research is consistent with other studies that these plans are not always efficiently implemented. According to Speculand (2009) nine out of ten strategies fail to be implemented successfully. Barrows (2009), in his article, "Four Flaws of Strategic Planning," also agrees that the execution of strategic plans is not a central focus in the minds of executives. He suggests that for a plan to be successful the planning and doing must be considered and according to Herbiniak (2006), "Managers must be thinking about execution even as they are formulating plans... and formulating and executing are parts of an integrated strategic management approach".

This research study was conducted to obtain insights on the strategic planning process in nonprofit organizations. The study intended to suggest factors that facilitate and inhibit the implementation of plans. The important factors indicated in this study include: the role of leadership and teamwork, consistent access to resources such as money, personnel, a strong infrastructure, and a user friendly final written document that includes a clear timeline. The most prominent factors in a successful strategic plan suggested by this study were engaged leadership and access to funds.

In conclusion, this research study raises more questions than answers and avoids the submission of quick fix remedies. However, these questions provide opportunities for additional research and reflection in order to understand the impact of strategic plans in bringing about effective changes in organizations. Overall, this research study serves as a contribution since few empirical studies have been conducted to understand stakeholders' perspectives on strategic planning.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Guides and Questions

Interview Guide: 1

QUESTIONS FOR DIRECTORS:

RESEARCH QUESTION # 1: What are key stakeholders' perspectives of the strategic planning process in their organizations and what roles did they play in the planning process?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- 1:1 Tell me your experience with strategic planning in your organization.
- 1:2 why was strategic planning initiated and who initiated it?
- 1:3 What was the purpose of having an external consultant and what role did the consultant play?
- 1:4 Would you recommend organizations for an external consultant to initiate the plan and why?

RESEARCH QUESTION # 2: What procedures were used to develop strategic planning in the organizations and what do participants say about these techniques?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- 2:1 Was there a planning committee and how was it selected, what criteria were used in selecting committee members?
- 2:2 How did other members in the organization who were not part of the committee participate in the strategic planning process?
- 2:3. What strategy did you use to reach out stakeholders who were not part of the committee and how did they use the plan?
- 2:3. Would you recommend changing or following the same planning process in the future and why? What improvements do you suggest?

RESEARCH QUESTION # 3: To what extent was the plan implemented? If implementation was incomplete what are some of the reasons for not fully implementing the plan?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- 3:1 Tell me about the implementation process. What parts of the plan have been implemented or are in the process of being implemented.
- 3:2 What has not been implemented and why?
- 3:3 Was there a timeline and how did it help the implementation process?
- 3:4 Was the plan written in a way that enabled a smooth implementation or were there difficulties? If there were difficulties, what were the difficulties?

3:5 Any suggestions with regard to writing the plan that would have improved the likelihood of the implementation of the plan?

RESEARCH QUESTION # 4: What contextual factors that facilitated and/or inhibited the implementation of strategic plans in the organization?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 4:1 What are some of the organizational factors that facilitated the successful implementation of the plan? Are there any additional factors that could have made implementation more successful?
- 4:2 What are some of the organizational factors that challenged the successful implementation of the plan and can you name the top three challenges of the implementation process
- 4:3 How did the plan benefit the organization in general? Did you notice any changes in the organization with the implementation of strategic planning?
- 4:4 In your opinion, did the plan achieve its purpose and to what extent?
- 4:5 Would you recommend future strategic planning after the current plan has been completed and why?
- 4:6 From your experience with this plan would you like to recommend any suggestions with regard to the planning process and implementation of future plans and what are some of your suggestions?
- 4:7 Does strategic planning allow your organization to be more or less flexible and adaptive? Does it boxes in people? How often do you evaluate the plan?
- 4:8 Do you think there are any other persons in your organization that will have different perspectives and information about strategic planning and the implementation process?

Interview Guide: 2

QUESTIONS FOR SENIOR STAFF MEMBERS

RESEARCH QUESTION # 1: What are key stakeholders' perspectives of the strategic planning process in their organizations and what roles did they play in the planning process?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- 1:1 Tell me your experience with strategic planning in your organization.
- 1:2 Was the plan that was developed specific about what was to be done, who was responsible, what were the implementation timelines?

RESEARCH QUESTION # 2: What procedures were used to develop strategic planning in the organizations and what do participants say about these techniques?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- 2:1 Was there a planning committee and how was it selected, what criteria were used in selecting committee members, and who ended up being on the committee?
- 2:2 How did other members in the organization who were not part of the committee participate in the strategic planning process?
- 2:3 Would you recommend changing or following the same planning process in the future and why? What improvements do you suggest?

RESEARCH QUESTION # 3: To what extent was the plan implemented? If implementation was incomplete what are some of the reasons for not fully implementing the plan

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- 3:1 Tell me about all the parts of the plan that have been implemented or are in the process of being implemented.
- 3:2 What has not been implemented and why?
- 3:3 Was the plan written in a way that enabled a smooth implementation or were there difficulties? If there were difficulties, what were the difficulties?
- 3:4 Was there anything that could have been done in either writing the plan or during the planning process that would have improved the likelihood that all aspects of the plan would be implemented?

RESEARCH QUESTION # 4: What contextual factors that facilitated and/or inhibited the implementation of strategic plans in the organization?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 4:1 What are some of the organizational factors that facilitated the successful implementation of the plan?
- 4:2 Are there any additional factors that could have made implementation more successful?
- 4:3 What are some of the organizational factors that challenged the successful implementation of the plan and can you name the top three challenges of the implementation process?
- 4:4 How did the plan benefit the organization and what were some of the changes that you noticed in the organization with the implementation of strategic planning?
- 4:5 In your opinion, did the plan achieve its purpose and to what extent?
- 4:6 Would you recommend future strategic planning after the current plan has been completed and why?

- 4:7 From your experience, would you like to recommend any suggestions for the successful implementation of future plans and what are some of those suggestions?
- 4:8 Does strategic planning allow your organization to be more or less flexible and adaptive?
- 4:9 Do you think there are any other persons in your organization that will have different perspectives and information about strategic planning and the implementation process?

Interview Guide: 3

QUESTIONS FOR BOARD MEMBERS

RESEARCH QUESTION # 1: What are key stakeholders' perspectives of the strategic planning process in their organizations and what roles did they play in the planning process?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- 1:1 Tell me your experience with strategic planning in your organization.
- 1:2 Who initiated the plan and why was it initiated? What role did you play?
- 1:3 When did the board have retreat and how did the board retreat help you and the board to initiate the plan?

RESEARCH QUESTION # 2: What procedures were used to develop strategic planning in the organizations and what do participants say about these techniques?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- 2:1 Was there a planning committee and how was it selected, what criteria were used in selecting committee members?
- 2:2 How were the board members selected to represent the committee and how did you share information back to the board?
- 2:3 How did other members of the organization who were not part of the committee participate in the strategic planning process?
- 2:4 Would you recommend changing or following the same planning process in the future and why? What improvements do you suggest and do you think that the board could involve better?

RESEARCH QUESTION # 3: To what extent was the plan implemented? If implementation was incomplete what are some of the reasons for not fully implementing the plan?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- 3:1 Tell me about the implementation process. What parts of the plan have been implemented or are in the process of being implemented. What role did the board play with regard to implementation?
- 3:2 Did the strategic planning have any timelines and should there be a timeline and why? How does it help the organization?
- 3:3 What process does the board use to monitor the implementation process and did the board pay enough attention and can they do something different in order to implement the plan more successfully?
- 3:4 What has not been implemented and what is the reason?
- 3:5 Was the plan written in a way that enabled a smooth implementation or were there any difficulties particularly among staff in understanding and accepting the plan? If there were difficulties, what were the difficulties?
- 3:6 How mechanism did the board use to find out if the plan was implemented? Was there any evaluation and how often and how did it help the plan?

RESEARCH QUESTION # 4: What contextual factors that facilitated and/or inhibited the implementation of strategic plans in the organization?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 4:1 What are some of the organizational factors that facilitated the successful implementation of the plan? Are there any additional factors that could have made implementation more successful?
- 4:2 What are some of the organizational factors that challenged the successful implementation of the plan and can you name the top three challenges of the implementation process?
- 4:3 How did the plan benefit the organization in general? Did you notice any changes in the organization with the implementation of strategic planning?
- 4:4 In your opinion, did the plan achieve its purpose and to what extent?
- 4:5 Would you recommend future strategic planning after the current plan has been completed and why?
- 4:6 From your experience with this plan would you like to recommend any suggestions with regard to the planning process and implementation of future plans and what are some of your suggestions?

Interview Guide: 4

QUESTIONS FOR CONSULTANTS

RESEARCH QUESTION # 1: What are key stakeholders' perspectives of the strategic planning process in their organizations and what roles did they play in the planning process?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- 1:1 Tell me your experience with strategic planning.
- 1:2 What role did you play? Did the planning committee have a retreat and how did it help them and do you suggest that all planning committees must start with a retreat?

RESEARCH QUESTION # 2: What procedures were used to develop strategic planning in the organizations and what do participants say about these techniques?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- 2:1 How was the planning committee selected, what criteria were used in selecting committee members? What role did you play in selecting the planning committee?
- 2:2 How did other members in the organization who were not part of the committee participate in the planning process?
- 2:3 How important it is to get their opinion and what type of forum was available for them to express their opinion?
- 2:4 Would you recommend changing or following the same planning process in future and why? What improvements do you suggest?

RESEARCH QUESTION # 3: To what extent was the plan implemented? If implementation was incomplete what are some of the reasons for not fully implementing the plan?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- 3:1 Tell me about the implementation process at Survivors. In your opinion do organizations implement all the recommendation?
- 3:2 If not, why?
- 3:3 Was the plan written in such a way that staff could understand or were there difficulties? If there were difficulties, what were the difficulties?
- 3:4 Did the strategic planning have any timelines and should they be a timeline and how does it help in the effective implementation?
- 3:5 What suggestions would you give with regard to writing the plan that would improve the likelihood of the implementation of the plan?

RESEARCH QUESTION # 4: What contextual factors facilitated and/or inhibited the implementation of strategic plans in the organization?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 4:1 What are some of the organizational factors that facilitated the successful implementation of the plan? ?
- 4:2 What are some of the organizational factors that challenged the successful implementation of the plan and can you name the top three challenges of the implementation process?
- 4:3 How did the plan benefit the organization? Did you notice any changes in the organization with the implementation of strategic planning?
- 4:4 In your opinion, did the plan achieve its purpose and to what extent? What suggestions do you give? Do you recommend periodic evaluation and any other?
- 4:5 Would you recommend future strategic planning after the current plan has been completed and why?
- 4:6 As a consultant to this plan would you like to recommend any suggestions with regard to the planning process and implementation of future plans and what are some of your suggestions?

Interview Guide: 5

QUESTIONS FOR FRONTLINE STAFF MEMBERS NOT ON PLANNING COMMITTEE

RESEARCH QUESTION # 1: What are key stakeholders' perspectives of the strategic planning process in their organizations and what roles did they play in the planning process?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- 1:1 Tell me your experience with strategic planning in your organization.
- 1:2 What role did you play in creating the plan and do you think you had enough opportunity to express your ideas? If not, what changes would you suggest for staff like you for active participation?
- 1:3 Did the strategic planning have any timelines and did that help you in implementing it and should they be a timeline and why?

RESEARCH QUESTION # 2: What procedures were used to develop strategic planning in the organizations and what do participants say about these techniques?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- 2:1 Was there a planning committee and how was it selected, what criteria were used in selecting committee members?
- 2:2 How did you and other staff members who were not part of the committee participate in the strategic planning process?
- 2:3 Would you recommend changing or following the same planning process in the future and why? What improvements do you suggest?

RESEARCH QUESTION # 3: To what extent was the plan implemented? If implementation was incomplete what are some of the reasons for not fully implementing the plan?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- 3:1 Tell me about the implementation process. What parts of the plan have been implemented or are in the process of being implemented.
- 3:2 Was the plan written in such a way that staff members could understand or were there any difficulties? If there were difficulties, what were some of the difficulties with regard to using the plan?
- 3:3 Any suggestions with regard to writing the plan in future that would improve the likelihood of the implementation of the plan?

RESEARCH QUESTION # 4: What contextual factors that facilitated and/or inhibited the implementation of strategic plans in the organization?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 4:1 What are some of the organizational factors that facilitated the successful implementation of the plan?
- 4:2 Are there any additional factors that could have made implementation more successful?
- 4:3 What are some of the organizational factors that challenged the successful implementation of the plan and can you name the top three challenges of the implementation process?
- 4:4 How did the plan benefit you in your work and the organization in general?
Did you notice any changes in the organization with the implementation of strategic planning?
- 4:5 In your opinion, did the plan achieve its purpose and to what extent?
- 4:6 Would you recommend future strategic planning after the current plan has been completed and why?

- 4:7 From your experience with this plan would you like to recommend any suggestions with regard to the planning process and implementation of future plans and what are some of your suggestions?
- 4:8 Does strategic planning allow your organization to be more or less flexible and adaptive? Does it boxes in people.
- 4:9 Do you think there are any other persons in your organization that will have different perspectives and information about strategic planning and the implementation process?

APPENDIX B

Introductory Letter to Participant Organizations

Dear _____

I am Devadhasan Masilamony, a doctoral candidate at the University of San Diego (USD). My area of specialization is nonprofit management, and the program requires me to do a research study on a topic connected to this specialization. My research topic is "Strategic Planning: Factors Affecting the Implementation Process." For this study, I intend to conduct a case study of two nonprofit organizations that have recently been involved in strategic planning.

If your organization is willing to participate, and meets the study criteria, the following persons will be interviewed: the Executive Director, two staff members who participated in the planning and implementation process of strategic planning, the Chairman of the Board or the Board representative who participated in the strategic planning process, one external stakeholder who was also part of the process, and the consultant who initiated the planning. In addition, in each interview, the researcher will ask who else in the organization should be interviewed for information-rich data or who in the organization might have a somewhat different perspective than the respondents.

In addition to interviewing key participants, I also will request a copy of the plan that was developed, along with any other relevant documents such as minutes of strategic planning committee meetings (if minutes were kept), any messages sent to members of the organization during the planning and implementation processes, evaluation report or any other information concerning the strategic planning implementation process in the organization.

All interviews will be tape recorded to facilitate data analysis and to insure that respondents will not be misquoted. However, if a respondent requests that a tape not be made, the tape recorder will not be used and only notes will be taken. If desired, the transcript and the final findings will be shared with both the respondents and the organization. Respondents' names and the organization's name will be changed in order to maintain confidentiality and to protect the respondents and the organization.

The purpose of the study is to help participating organizations and the nonprofit sector, in general, become aware of how the strategic planning process plays out in practice and any implementation difficulties that might arise after a plan has been developed. The research topic was selected, not only because dissertation research is a requirement for the completion of my doctoral program, but also because it is my passion to help organizations improve and use their limited resources meaningfully through systematic planning and the implementation of the plans that get developed.

Thank you for considering this request to study the strategic planning and implementation process in your organization. If you have any questions about this research study, please contact Devadhasan Masilamony at (619) 667-3582 or Devadhasan's research advisor at the University of San Diego, Dr. Robert Donmoyer at (619) 985-9309.

If you agree to let your organization participate in the research study, please provide a letter indicating this agreement.

Devadhasan Masilamony

Doctoral Candidate

University of San Diego

APPENDIX C

Major Findings

Migrants Rehabilitation and Development (MRD)

I interviewed six people at MRD on a topic connected to my specialization and research study at the University of San Diego. The research topic was, “Strategic Planning: Factors Affecting the Implementation Process.” I am grateful to the members who participated in the research study. As mentioned in my introductory letter, I am happy to share with you some of the major findings and solicit your feedback.

The study indicated that the planning process to develop the plan was well organized. MRD had an effective planning committee to develop the plan and the respondents called the committee “balanced.” The committee had a successful combination of internal and external stakeholders with knowledge and experience about the program as well as the topic strategic planning.

MRD hired an external person to facilitate the planning process. The study indicated the facilitator was neutral and an expert on the topic. This allowed for a free flow of information and enabled the planning committee members and the staff to share information without fear or intimidation. It also encouraged active participation among staff and created a positive impact on the implementation of the plan.

The study further indicated that the CEO and the leadership team were committed and they encouraged teamwork during the planning and implementation process of the plan. One respondent called the CEO a cheerleader, and as the cheerleader, the CEO kept the plan on track and enabled the organization to move towards the right direction.

The respondents said that the communication system was effective and clarified their roles. MRD used the Internet, staff meetings, and newsletters to communicate with its staff and other stakeholders. The final written document of the strategic planning was

short and specific. It had a clear timeline. The specific nature of the document and the integration of the plan with the daily activities of the organization enabled the implementation of the plan. One staff respondent said, “The integration of the document brought life to the plan and made it a living document.”

The study further indicated that funding for the organization was unpredictable. The public viewed MRD’s work controversial and such perception may have had a negative impact with regard to raising funds and mobilizing volunteers locally.

Although the funding situation did not have a major impact, on the operation of the organization as a whole, it did provide challenges with respect to the implementation of the plan. Workload was cited as another reason that inhibited the implementation. A small staff had to manage many programs and this resulted in the staff being overworked. Because MRD is a small organization, it lacked sufficient qualified staff to implement the recommendations and to raise funds and write project proposals. The situation was further complicated by the fact that staff retention was low. The reasons for this included inadequate pay, lack of pay raises, and job insecurity.

The respondents said that strategic planning initiative clarified their mission and provided direction to the organization. The planning process created much enthusiasm in the organization, though some of the respondents expressed that MRD could not maintain that enthusiasm during the implementation phase in part because implementation was not as structured as the planning process. However, the management team kept the plan on track and provided guidance and direction to the staff.

I would like to express my deepest thanks and gratitude for allowing me to study your organization and becoming part of my study at USD.

Social Concern for Youth (SCY)

I interviewed six people at SCY on a topic connected to my specialization and research study at the University of San Diego. The research topic was, "Strategic Planning: Factors Affecting the Implementation Process." I am grateful to the members who participated in the research study. As mentioned in my introductory letter, I am happy to share with you some of the major findings and solicit your feedback.

The study indicated that the planning process at SCY was well organized; however, the implementation process was not as well organized or structured. SCY had a good planning committee to develop the plan. The planning committee members were senior staff with experience and knowledge and they were also representatives of important departments and programs within the organization.

With regard to the facilitator, the respondents commented on the depth of knowledge and commitment of the person who facilitated the process, i.e., the CEO of the organization. However, the study indicated that having an external facilitator could have encouraged a free flow of information among staff and other stakeholders, and it might have created a positive impact on the implementation.

The frontline staff members did not seem to be effectively involved in the planning process. Literature on strategic planning emphasizes the importance of involving the frontline staff members because they play an important role with regard to the implementation of plans.

The study further indicated that the office atmosphere was friendly; one said that it was a caring and friendly environment. According to those interviewed that SCY provided the staff freedom and opportunity for creativity and initiating new programs.

There was a general feeling among staff that the final written document was too broad and technical and lacked a clear specific timeline. The generic and technical nature of the document did not motivate the staff to use the document. They claimed that a clear timeline and effective integration of the plan into the organization's daily activities would have created a better impact with regard to the implementation of the plan.

SCY did not have an implementation committee to oversee the implementation of the plan. The study indicated that the CEO expected the entire organization to get involved in the implementation of the plan. The approach seemed to be well-intentioned but the study indicated that the implementation of the plan did not happen as expected.

The study also revealed that the plans had several recommendations that were not clearly prioritized. Therefore, the staff members seemed to be rather confused as to where to start and what to implement. Moreover, the implementation of the plan did not seem to have a clear timeline and the responsibilities of implementing these recommendations were not given to any particular staff members or committee or department.

The respondents said that the plan clarified their mission and provided direction. The planning process created much enthusiasm in the organization especially among senior staff members, but SCY did not seem to sustain that enthusiasm during the implementation phase of the plan, partly because the leadership or the leadership team did not show much commitment in implementing it. Part of the reason, presumably was, that SCY did not have any structured follow up program or any evaluation plan.

I would like to express my deepest thanks and gratitude for allowing me to study your organization and you becoming part of my study at USD.